

EFFECTIVE COOPERATION BETWEEN MODALITY AND
SODALITY STRUCTURE IN NORTH INDIA:
A CASE STUDY OF BHARAT SUSAMACHAR SAMITI, NEW
THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE AND CHRISTIAN EVANGELISTIC
ASSEMBLIES IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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To the best gift that I have received from my Lord Jesus, other than my salvation and the call to serve Him, my life-partner, Leelamma, with my love and appreciation.

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first Pentecostal to ever serve in such capacities in the Senate of Serampore. I am deeply indebted to this man of God and his wife Mercy for their invaluable contributions in making our vision a reality.

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ABSTRACT

India has always been a challenge to Christian Missions. With 1.2 billion people who belong to 4,693 ethnic groups and speak more than 400 languages it still is home to the largest number of unreached people groups in the world. The greatest need that the Indian Church faces in the 21st century is for large numbers of dedicated and well-trained servant-leaders to serve the existing congregations *and* to reach the remaining unreached people groups and languages with the gospel. It is widely recognized that the prevalent dominant paradigm of training has many weaknesses that are adversely affecting the health of the Church. The chorus-like assertions of several studies both by the evangelical and the liberal wings of the Church affirm this truth. What can we do to at least alleviate, if not eliminate, these weaknesses and thus strengthen the Church?

This study is looking at the ministries of a modality and sodality (Christian Evangelistic Assemblies and Bharat Susamachar Samiti/New Theological College) that have been closely working together with some success for more than two decades in northern India to learn principles that might help to alleviate these weaknesses. At first we briefly look at the history of the Church and theological education in India to learn from those who have gone before us. Then we look at the way the modality and sodality have worked together. From these we have chosen six principles which we believe are keys in alleviating the weaknesses of the prevalent existing paradigm of theological education/Christian leadership training.

CHAPTER ONE: THESIS AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction: Why This Study?

Suppose you have a call to reach a country of 1.2 billion people with the gospel and plant churches among the hundreds of its unreached people groups. And suppose you decide to form a strategy to accomplish this call. The strategy: *reach one thousand different people every day with the gospel*. Imagine the shock you would have when you find out that if you reach one thousand different people *every single day* it would take close to three thousand two hundred and eighty eight *years* just to preach the gospel to 1.2 billion people! And that is without considering any problems with cross-cultural communication, learning the innumerable languages spoken by all these people and other issues that are very important in preaching the gospel.¹

This scenario helped me to understand, like never before, our Lord's words in Matthew 9: 37 as it applies to my own native land, the country of India with its 1.2 billion people: "*The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few.*"

The key to reaching a country like India with the gospel and planting churches among its multitudes of people groups became all the more clear to me at that time: *multiply workers*. No one can accomplish the task alone. Multiple thousands of committed, well-trained workers are essential if we are to ever reach a country like India

¹ This is something that actually happened to me in 1984 when the Lord forcefully reminded me of my call to go back to India from the US and plant churches among the unreached people groups of northern India. I took up a calculator and calculated the time it would take to reach a huge country like India with the gospel if one preaches to one thousand people a day. At that time the population of India was only 800 million. It was a shock for me to discover that it would take nearly 2,192 years for a person just to preach to 800 million people if s/he preaches to 1,000 different people every single day. Now with the population of India having crossed the 1.2 billion mark it would take nearly 3,288 years for one person to accomplish the same.

with its 4,693² ethnic groups³ and 416⁴ languages that belong to four families with eleven major scripts.

It is this conviction that motivated me to establish Christian Evangelistic Assemblies or CEA (“modality”) and Bharat Susamachar Samiti (BSS)⁵ and New Theological College (NTC) –“sodalities.”⁶ The primary goals of these modality and sodalities are training, sending and supporting workers to preach the gospel and plant churches among the unreached people groups and in unreached places of the Indian subcontinent, *and* strengthen the existing churches, with a special focus on northern India.⁷

Since January 15, 1986 my primary focus has been accomplishing this vision. God has blessed our efforts in that well over 2,000 workers have been trained and these in turn have established hundreds of congregations in India, Nepal, and Myanmar. Christian Evangelistic Assemblies alone planted over six hundred congregations in fifteen states of India, a good number among unreached people groups and places. A

²K.S. Singh, *Anthropological Survey of India, 3 Vols.* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998).

³ The Indian subcontinent is home to the largest number of unreached people groups (*ethna*= *nations*) in the world. The New Testament word *ethna* is translated as “*jathi*” in most Indian languages.

⁴ This is an evolving number; even as late as the eighties the government of India used to publish the number of languages in India as 1,652. Since then that has been shown to be inaccurate as a number of languages has died or was counted many times. Surveys are still ongoing to determine the exact number of languages. Wycliffe Bible translators are making significant contributions in this attempt.

⁵ *Bharat Susamachar Samiti* is a rough translation of *Good News for India*, the ministry that I started in the US to generate prayer and financial support for the work in India. Further history of BSS, CEA and NTC is given in chapter IV.

⁶ See below for explanation of the terms “modality” and “sodality”.

⁷Theoretically, if there are 3,288 trained laborers and each would preach to one thousand different people a day, India can be evangelized in one year. Once again the important point is that there is no short-cut to reaching a country like India with the gospel; if we desire to see the Great Commission fulfilled we must take Matthew 9:37 and 38 seriously and pray for more workers and do everything we can to make sure that there are enough well-trained Kingdom workers who are committed to preaching the gospel and planting churches in every nook and corner of India.

number of our graduates are serving the Lord with several major denominations in the subcontinent. Some of our graduates are also serving the Lord in countries such as Cambodia and the United States.

The close relationship that we purposefully established among the modality and sodality structures from the very beginning itself has made our efforts in theological education and Christian leadership training different from many other theological seminaries and Bible Colleges. We believe that there are lessons that we have learned from this close working of modality and sodality for more than two decades that would help to strengthen theological education, Christian leadership training and ultimately the Church. The purpose of this study is to examine the history of CEA, BSS and NTC with the goal of discovering these lessons.

“Modality” and “Sodality”

Before we begin the study proper it is apropos to explain these two key terms that appear in the title of this study. What do we mean by “modality” and “sodality”?⁸ In very simple terms, the congregation in Antioch was a “modality” whereas the missionary band of Paul and Barnabas was a “sodality” (see Acts 13: 1-3).⁹ A *modality* is a structured organization with diverse responsibilities and includes men and women of all ages. In contrast a *sodality* involves a secondary commitment beyond membership in the

⁸ I am dependent on Timothy C. Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions: A Trinitarian Missiology for the Twenty-first Century* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academics, 2010), 441-57 for the explanation of these terms.

⁹ Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions*, 442.

modality, and membership is generally restricted in some way. Sodalities normally have a much narrower focus.¹⁰

Sodalities developed from fourth century on in the church either to reenergize the church that had grown cold or to take the gospel to unchurched cultures and peoples.¹¹ The Benedictine monks are one of the earliest examples of members of a sodality. Franciscans, Dominicans, and Jesuits-known as *mendicant* orders- are all sodalities that sprung up in the Roman Catholic Church for internal spiritual renewal and/or missionary outreach.¹² The Roman Catholic Church has greatly benefited from the modality and sodality structures working together for centuries in spite of occasional tensions that have developed between the two.

The ecclesiology developed by Luther and other Protestant Reformers made it very difficult to have room for sodalities within the new understanding of church. As a result we see what Timothy Tennent calls “the great gap: 1517-1793” in Protestant history where there was no sodality structure to carry on missionary work.¹³ It took the genius of William Carey, over two and three quarters of centuries later, to create the first protestant sodality.¹⁴

Though we had not thought through or understood the full implications of this, we believe that the Lord led us sovereignly to organize the structure of the ministries we pioneered in north India as modality and sodality. This structure has greatly enhanced our

¹⁰ Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions*, 441. Emphasis in the original.

¹¹ Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions*, 443.

¹² Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions*, 444.

¹³ Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions*, 449-50.

¹⁴ Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions*, 453.

effectiveness in fulfilling the vision that the Lord gave us. This we hope to demonstrate through this study. We now turn to that.

Issues in Theological Education

Being actively involved in both theological education and church planting for more than two decades in northern India has brought a number of troubling issues related to these fields to my attention. I believe that these issues are significant and need to be taken seriously to assure the healthy growth and development of the rapidly expanding Church in India.

These issues are not unique to India by any means as a casual survey of related literature will show. Concerned Christians around the world have been struggling with them for a long time. A very brief survey of the attempts to understand and solve the problems is apropos.

The opinion that the Church is failing in properly training workers for its various ministries is a long standing one held by many around the world. This prompted the late John D. Rockefeller, Jr., to fund a study in the 1930s to discover the cause of the problem and suggest ways to correct it.¹⁵ The study was led by William Adams Brown of Union Theological Seminary and was limited to the North American scene. It recommended that the curriculum must focus on the practice of ministry and not research interest. Not much happened as a result of the study.

¹⁵ Robert W. Ferris, *Renewal in Theological Education: Strategies for Change* (Wheaton: Wheaton College Billy Graham Center Publication, 1990), 8.

So, twenty years later, another study of theological education in the United States and Canada was commissioned by Carnegie Corporation. H. Richard Niebuhr led this investigation. This study too did very little to change the real world of theological training.¹⁶

In the 1980s the Lilly Endowment funded another study of theological education and two books have come out as a result of this.¹⁷ Commenting on the volumes Robert W. Ferris writes: “Sadly, both titles are more useful for documenting the distressing state of North American theological education than pointing the way toward equipping Church leaders.”¹⁸

While the above mentioned studies were focused on the problem in North America there were attempts to tackle the issue globally with a special focus on the “younger churches.” The need for renewal of theological education globally was clearly stated by the International Missionary Council’s 1938 conference in Tambaram, Madras:

Almost all the younger churches are dissatisfied with the present system of training for the ministry and with its results. In many reports received from different parts of the world, it is stated that there are ministers of poor standard of education, who are unable to win the respect of the laity and to lead the churches, that some are out of touch with the realities of life and the needs of their people, and are not distinguished by zeal for Christian service in the community.¹⁹

¹⁶Ferris, *Renewal*, 8.

¹⁷ J.C. Hough and J.B. Cobb, *Christian Identity and Theological Education* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985) and M.L. Stackhouse, *Apologia: Contextualization, Globalization, and Mission in Theological Education* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988).

¹⁸ Ferris, *Renewal*, 8

¹⁹ *The Life of the Church*. Vol. 4, *The Madras Series* (New York: International Missionary Council, 1939). Quoted in Ferris, *Renewal*, 9.

Section VIII of the same meeting addressed the issue of “The Indigenous Ministry of the Church, Both Ordained and Lay.” The concluding remarks of the meeting are a strong plea for a thorough review and renewal of the task of ministry preparation:

It is our conviction that the present condition of theological education is *one of the greatest weaknesses in the whole Christian enterprise, and that no great improvement can be expected until churches and mission boards pay far greater attention to this work*, particularly to the need for cooperative and united effort, and contribute more largely in funds and in personnel in order that it may be effectively carried out.

In writing this report, we have used all the material submitted to us, but we are conscious that it has been prepared on the basis of very inadequate information. We think that the time has come for a much more thorough investigation and survey of this field than has yet been carried out. Valiant experiments are being made, and new methods are being tried in different countries. But these enterprises are for the most part isolated, and there is hardly any exchange of experience and ideas between the different areas.

We, therefore, instruct the Committee of the International Missionary Council to take action in this matter, in consultation with the churches, and that a commission be appointed as soon as possible, to arrange for the preparation of detailed studies of the situation, where these have not been made, to visit the main centers of theological education and to work out a policy and program for the training of the ministry in younger churches.²⁰

Though such serious concerns were raised by the Tambaram study, not much could be done because of the eruption of the Second World War. The national Christian Council of India, Burma, and Ceylon proceeded with its own study. The result was Charles Ranson’s *The Christian Minister in India: His Vocation and Training* published in 1945. Following that, several reports on theological training in Africa, Madagascar, Middle East, Latin America and the Caribbean were published. These studies resulted in the establishment of the Theological Education Fund (TEF) of the World Council of Churches in 1958.

²⁰ Ferris, *Renewal*, 9-10. Emphasis added.

Though the birth of TEF was the result of a keen awareness of the need for renewal in theological education its subsequent history is not very encouraging. In 1973 TEF published *Learning in Context: the Search for Innovative Patterns in Theological Education*²¹ with essays from several scholars who are concerned about the future of theological education. These essays also contributed precious little in changing the course of theological education for the better.

Attempts Within India to Reform Theological Education

Responding to the criticisms, there have been many attempts to reform and renew theological education/Christian leadership training from within India. The Lindsay Commission on Christian Education in India and Burma was appointed in 1930.²² The Commission made two very strong recommendations: 1. Need for cooperation among all churches in theological education. 2. Need of theological literature in regional languages.²³

It is important to note that Charles Ranson's *The Christian Minister in India* published in 1945 strongly affirmed these two points once again. He went one step further in recommending organizing united regional schools for theological education in regional languages "without neglecting the knowledge of English."²⁴

²¹ *Learning in Context: The Search for Innovative Patterns in Theological Education* (Kent, England: Theological Education Fund, 1973).

²² Gnana Robinson and H.S. Wilson, "Perspective in Theological Education", *Asia Journal of Theology* 2, no.1 (April 1988): 69.

²³ Robinson and Wilson, "Perspective in Theological Education", 69. Emphasis added.

²⁴ Robinson and Wilson, "Perspective in Theological Education", 70.

Another study was commissioned ten years after the publication of Ranson's report. One H.M. Harrison did the study and affirmed again the recommendations of Lindsay and Ranson, though he made the curious recommendation that "no more theological colleges be established in India"!²⁵

Again in 1968 another report was published after a year-long major national consultation on theological education in India. This study affirmed the above recommendations. In addition, Hudson, the author of the study strongly recommended that emphasis must be given to training of the laity.²⁶

In 1972 an all India consultation on the 'Structure of Theological Education' was held in Nagpur. This consultation recommended that there should be:

Coordination and joint action in the field of theological education by providing a dynamic fellowship extending over a wide theological spectrum and also *covering a variety of types of theological education such as formal theological training institution, study centers, frontier mission institutes, lay training centers, theological extension programmes, etc.*²⁷

Another consultation was held in 1974 on 'National Study on Theological Training of the Whole Church and New Patterns of Training'. The consensus of the consultation was that theological education in India was failing the Church.

It produces persons with degrees but without initiative for responsible and creative leadership. It did not equip them with a vision and courage to change the existing system. So, what is required is not just innovations or better methods of teaching but a radical concept of education itself. To facilitate such a theological renewal, a deep involvement in the Indian situation is required.²⁸

²⁵ Robinson and Wilson, "Perspective in Theological Education", 70.

²⁶ Robinson and Wilson, "Perspective in Theological Education", 70.

²⁷ Robinson and Wilson, "Perspective in Theological Education", 71. Emphasis added.

²⁸ Robinson and Wilson, "Perspective in Theological Education", 71.

One more consultation followed in 1981.²⁹ In this consultation much attention is focused on the under-representation of women, tribals and backward and scheduled castes in the theological seminaries- both among students and faculty. According to a report in 1978 ninety-five percent of theological students, ninety percent of the teachers and ninety-four percent of the governing Board/Council members are male.³⁰

The second major concern expressed in this study is the disconnect that theological education in India has with the rural populations. As all major theological study centers are located in urban areas there is very little concern shown for the rural areas and peoples. Moreover, theological graduates often refuse to serve in remote areas where the infrastructure is undeveloped or underdeveloped.³¹ These are valid concerns and do demand our attention.

In 1986 another national consultation was organized in Bangalore by the National Council of Churches and the Senate of Serampore to discuss the need to both “change the patterns of ministry” and “the structures in theological education”.³² The consultation recognized that the existing theological education was not meeting “the needs of the people” and many graduates did not have “a readiness to go out to people where they are.”³³

²⁹ Robinson and Wilson, “Perspective in Theological Education”, 78.

³⁰ Robinson and Wilson, “Perspective in Theological Education”, 71.

³¹ It might be worth noting that this has been a problem from the early days of Protestant theological training in India. Both the Serampore College and Bishop’s College faced this challenge. See Chapter 3. The Roman Catholics have been far more successful in overcoming this dilemma and we need to learn from their example.

³² Sam Amirtham, “Towards a Contextualized Curriculum: An Indian Attempt,” *Ministerial Formation* 34 (June 1986): 29.

³³ Amirtham, “Towards a Contextualized Curriculum”, 29.

As a result of the 1986 consultation a few baby steps were taken “to learn theology in the language of the people, to do theology in relation to people’s struggles and aspirations”.³⁴

Asia Theological Association (ATA), the more evangelical accrediting agency and a member of the World Evangelical Fellowship (as against the Serampore family³⁵ which is closely associated with the World Council of Churches) has also expressed its concern in reforming and renewing theological education in India. The parent body of ATA, The International Council of Accrediting Agencies for Evangelical Theological Education (ICAA), published a ‘manifesto’ in June 1983 making this renewal a top priority³⁶. ICAA organized a consultation in 1987 on ‘Excellence and Renewal in Theological Education’.³⁷

Results of the Reformation Attempts

Looking back at all these consultations and studies going all the way back to the 1930’s one really wonders what has been accomplished by these. Even a casual observer cannot escape the chorus-like repetition of the same weaknesses of theological

³⁴ Amirtham, “Towards a Contextualized Curriculum”, 30.

³⁵ The College that William Carey and his colleagues started in Serampore, near Calcutta (Kolkata) in 1818 came to be known as Serampore College. In 1827 it obtained a Royal Charter from the king of Denmark and became the first western University in India. Serampore College was the first college to be affiliated to the University of Calcutta when it was formed in 1857. This relationship was severed in 1883. The original University charter was renewed and affirmed by the Serampore College Act of 1918 by the Bengal Legislative Council (British Government). Thus the Senate of Serampore (often referred to as Serampore family) remains the only body with the status of a University that can issue Protestant theological degrees in India. At present there are fifty-three seminaries that are affiliated to the Senate of Serampore. See Ravi Tiwari, *Senate of Serampore College (University) at Ninety: Issues and Concerns* (Serampore: Senate of Serampore College, n. d.).

³⁶ Ferris, *Renewal* Appendix A., 139-146.

³⁷ Ferris, *Renewal*, 2.

education/Christian leadership training year-after-year. There are a few in the academic circles in India who think a lot has been accomplished. For example Sam Amirtham writes: “Remarkable changes were made in some regional seminaries in the South, for example in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu.”³⁸

Gnana Robinson is also of the opinion that much has been accomplished through these consultations.³⁹ It is true that there has been more cooperation between denominations in theological education in India. UTC in Bangalore, UBS in Pune, TTS in Madurai, and Gurukul in Chennai are all good examples of this. It is also gratifying to note that a few regional seminaries in South India have adopted regional languages for instruction. Tamil Nadu Theological Seminary is, once again, a good example for this. Now one can pursue up to a Master of Theology degree in Tamil in TTS. Robinson has written: “This emphasis of theological education in regional languages has indeed revolutionized theological education in India.”⁴⁰

While we do recognize these positive changes, many evangelical Christian leaders in India do not agree with the rosy assessment. The feeling that seminaries are “directionless”, the curricula are “unrelated to life”, graduates are “ill prepared for ministry”, and seminaries are concerned only about academics are all still valid criticisms of the theological education scene of India even today.⁴¹ Sunder Singh, a former Principal of Madras Theological Seminary, expressed the feelings of many evangelicals when he wrote: “One of William Carey’s greatest achievements was the founding of

³⁸ Ferris, *Renewal*, 2.

³⁹ Robinson and Wilson, “Perspective in Theological Education”, 72.

⁴⁰ Robinson and Wilson, “Perspective in Theological Education”, 72.

⁴¹ Ferris, *Renewal*, 7; See also A.K. Lama, *Re-envisioning Seminary-Church Relationships: A Response from the Baptist Churches in Northeast India* (Unpublished Paper, 2010).

Serampore College in 1819 for the training of indigenous church-planters and evangelists. However today, we see theological institutions losing their original vision for which they were established.”⁴²

Another glaring weakness of the existing paradigm is that it is *incapable* of training anywhere near the numbers of Christian workers needed for the harvest that is waiting to be harvested in the sub-continent.

Very little has been done to follow the Lindsay Commission’s recommendation (made in 1930!) to produce theological literature in regional languages. This is painfully true in North India where hundreds of millions speak Hindi, the national language of India and yet precious little Christian theological literature exists in that language. Charles Ranson’s recommendation (made in 1945!) to open up new schools in regional languages is also scantily obeyed in North India.

The 1972 consultation called for more emphasis on “frontier Missions institutes” and “lay training centers and theological extension programmes”. Yet the Serampore family has stopped the extension B.D. program. It is good that it has recently launched a Bachelor of Christian Studies (BCS) and Diploma in Christian Studies (Dip.C.S.) primarily directed towards the lay people. TAFTEE (The Association for Theological Education by Extension) has a strong voice in the Serampore family.⁴³ Yet in spite of the 1974 commission’s call for a ‘radical concept of theological education’ the basic methodology and philosophy of training have remained the same.

⁴² J. J. Harris, *Evangelicals are True Ecumenicals! The Theological Pilgrimage of the Indian Church: A Study of Contrasts- the Futility of Polarization* (Chennai: Mission Educational Books, 2006), 81.

⁴³ F. Ross Kinsler, ed., *Ministry by the People* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1983), 13.

The launching of a seminary known as Satyaniketan (a Sanskrit word with the beautiful meaning “the abode of truth”) on January 12, 1986 in Allahabad, UP, was looked upon as a new day in theological training in the North. The instruction was to be in the Hindi language and teaching methods were supposed to be culturally appropriate. Adoption of a nine part (“an Indian holy number”⁴⁴) curriculum under terms such as “Satyaniketan” (introduction: the story of the seminary), “sat-asat” (truth and non-truth of Indian reality), “sat-marg” (way of truth), “param-sat” (ultimate reality, the reality of God), “sat-guru” (concept of Guru as teacher, Jesus being the Guru), “sat-atma” (the True Spirit or Spirit of Truth), “sat-sangh” (the community of truth), “sat-granth” (true Scriptures) and “sat-yuga”(the age of truth to come) was hailed as truly a break through.⁴⁵ But once again the great hopes have been proven baseless. Satyaniketan struggled for its existence and had to be closed down without playing any significant role in the renewal of the Church in the North.

The story is almost the same with World Evangelical Fellowship’s efforts to revitalize theological education and leadership training in India. ATA has often relaxed its standards to accommodate institutions that are not academically sound and thus has lost respect among many. Graduates from ATA accredited schools do not show radically different attitude or effectiveness in the fields.⁴⁶ Commenting on the situation Robert W. Ferris has written: “Enthusiasm for renewal is difficult to find within the WEF

⁴⁴ Kinsler, *Ministry*, 31.

⁴⁵ Kinsler, *Ministry*, 32.

⁴⁶ I am not aware of any careful study comparing the effectiveness of Serampore degree-holders vs. ATA degree-holders. From the limited personal experience that I have, I cannot vouch for much radical difference between the two groups.

Theological Commission and the ICAA . . .”⁴⁷ It is also a sad fact that the Senate of Serampore has looked upon the attempt of World Evangelical Fellowship to renew theological education in India with suspicion, if not with hostility.⁴⁸

Thus, sadly we must say that the suggestions put forth by the consultations have not made any significant impact on theological education/Christian leadership training in India. Serious introspection is needed to discover the reasons for the status quo.

Are we, as leaders, out of touch with the everyday realities that the ordinary members of the Church of Jesus Christ face? Are we really listening to the Holy Spirit and the crying needs that are everywhere in India? It seems to me that while most of us recognize that there are problems, none seems to really know what to do. The problems are serious and the Church as a whole needs to pay attention and do what is necessary to find answers.

This thesis is a humble attempt to voice the issues as I understand them and suggest some possible solutions in the light of my personal experiences during the past two decades of being actively involved in both theological education *and* church planting ministry in northern India.

Summary of Problems Identified by the Consultations

The following is a quick summary of the major problems with theological education that have been identified by the above mentioned consultations and studies and also from my own personal experience.

⁴⁷ Kinsler, *Ministry*, 31.

⁴⁸ Robinson and Wilson, “Perspective in Theological Education”, 73.

- a) Lack of love for the Lord, His Word and His Church; hence lack of zeal, vision, initiative and creative leadership for ministry.
- b) Church-School dichotomy; training that is disjointed from the Church.
- c) Lack of focus on spiritual formation and ministry formation of trainees and *excessive* emphasis on academics.
- d) Lack of adequate numbers of trained leaders to meet the need.
- e) Lack of theological training and literature in regional languages.
- f) Lack of opportunities for the training of laity, women, tribals and Dalits.
- g) Out of touch with the realities of life and needs of the common people.
- h) Over-dependence on Western models.
- i) Lack of cooperation among denominations/fellowships in training.
- j) 'Disconnect' with rural population (often undeveloped and/or underdeveloped areas); lack of readiness to go where the needy are.

Methodology of the Study

We will begin with a quick look at the history of church planting in India with the goal of finding some keys to help us. After that we will take a brief survey of theological education in India from the early days with the hope that we might gain valuable insights to guide us in the process of seeking solutions to the problems that we face today.

After these two surveys we will specifically look at the ministries of theological education and church planting that we have pioneered and led for more than two decades in northern India. Theological education and Christian leadership training are provided primarily by the Luther W. New Jr. Theological College, commonly known as New

Theological College or NTC operated by a registered educational and charitable society, Bharat Susamachar Samiti (BSS). Church planting ministry is being carried out by Christian Evangelistic Assemblies (CEA). As a result of these modality and sodality working hand in hand nearly forty formerly unreached people groups have been reached by the gospel. Over six hundred congregations have been started, many in places where there never was a church. A number of existing congregations have experienced significant revivals as a result of NTC graduates assuming their leadership.

Then we will conclude our study by summarizing the lessons we have learned by the close working together of these modality and sodality. We are hopeful that these lessons might show us the way to at least partially solve the problems identified above.

CHAPTER TWO: CHURCH PLANTING IN INDIA: A BRIEF SURVEY

Introduction

Before we look at the history of theological education in India it would be helpful to have a bird's eye-view of the history of Christianity in India. India is home to almost all the Christian traditions in the world. Some of these traditions are much older than any in the West. Though every major tradition within the Church has tried to "win" India, none has been particularly successful. Christians still form a very small percentage of the population.¹

Yet Christianity has played a very important role in building modern India and Christians hold very prominent positions in the society.² Christianity has done more for the educational infra-structure of the country than any other religious group. Christians have been trail-blazers in serving the poor and the needy. A brief look at this rather unique history will be helpful for us in tackling the issues with which we are concerned in this study.

¹ The last census of India shows Christian population as 2.3%. A number of Indian Christian leaders believe that Christians are at least 5%. Many social factors prevent an accurate census. India is planning a new census during 2011 and we hope that a more accurate picture would emerge from this census. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/in.html> accessed on October 8, 2010.

² One of the most powerful persons in today's India is Mrs. Sonia Gandhi, a Roman Catholic. So is the Defense Minister of India, Mr. A.K. Antony. It must be added that Mrs. Sonia Gandhi, an Italian by birth, is in her powerful position because she married into the Gandhi family.

Historic Christianity in India

The history of the Christian Church in India is believed to be almost as ancient as the Church itself. According to age-old traditions that are held dearly by a vast number of Indian Christians, the Church is present in India from the first century. But the near absence of documentary evidence for the first few centuries makes it very difficult to categorically affirm or deny this tradition.³ There is really no way to conclusively prove or disprove that Saint Thomas, one among the Twelve, came to India and established several churches and then was martyred⁴ as is believed by millions of South Indian Christians. In this regard the words of Bishop L. W. Brown are very helpful:

We cannot prove that the Apostle worked in South India any more than we can disprove that fact; but the presence of Christians of undoubtedly ancient origin holding firmly to the tradition, the proof of very considerable commercial contact between the western world and the Malabar coast in the first century of our era, and the probable presence of Jewish colonies at the same time, may for some incline the balance to belief that the truth of the tradition is a reasonable probability. The evidence we have cannot do more than this.⁵

There are two traditions of St. Thomas in India: one North Indian tradition and the other a South Indian tradition.

³ A. Mathias Mundadan, *From the Beginning up to the Middle of the Sixteenth Century (up to 1542)*, vol. 1 of *History of Christianity in India* (Bangalore: Church History Association of India, 1989), 3.

⁴ Samuel Hugh Moffett quotes a number of secular historians, including the Hindu historian K.M. Panikkar, who has a reputation of being a very critical scholar, whose judgment is in favor of accepting the veracity of the tradition as based on a kernel of historical fact. See *A History of Christianity in Asia: Vol. 1: Beginnings to 1500* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 40.

⁵ Quoted by C.B. Firth, *An Introduction to Indian Church History* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1976), 15-16. from Bishop L.W. Brown's book *The Indian Christians of St. Thomas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), 59.

The first speaks of Thomas arriving in North India as a slave to King Gundaphorus.⁶ Stephen Neill is convinced that the apocryphal *Acts of Thomas*, the third century Gnostic work, in which we read this story, has a kernel of truth behind it.⁷ According to the *Acts of Thomas* when the twelve disciples of Jesus divided the regions of the world among themselves to go and preach the Gospel, India fell to “Judas Thomas”. But he did not want to go to India even after the Lord personally appeared to him and assured him of His grace. So the Lord devised a plan to sell Thomas as a slave to an agent of the Indian king, Gundaphorus, who had come to Jerusalem searching for an expert carpenter to build a palace for the king. Thus, as a slave, Thomas was forced to reach North West India.

Acts of Thomas contains “many miraculous fantasies”⁸ so that it is hard to take it as serious history. At the same time as Samuel Hugh Moffett writes: “. . . the vivid picture it (*Acts of Saint Thomas*) paints of Thomas as the ‘apostle to Asia’ is a fitting introduction to the story of the church in Asia.”⁹

Till 1834 historians used to dismiss Gundaphorus, “the king of India”, outright as a pure fictitious character. All that changed in 1834 with the discovery of a number of coins bearing his name in the Kabul Valley of Afghanistan.¹⁰ Now we know that a king

⁶ Stephen Neill, *A History of Christianity in India: The Beginnings to A D 1707* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 26.

⁷ Neill, *Christianity in India: The Beginnings*, 26.

⁸ Moffett, *Christianity in Asia*, 1: 27.

⁹ Moffett, *Christianity in Asia*, 1: 25.

¹⁰ Moffett, *Christianity in Asia*, 1: 29.

with that name¹¹ belonging to the Indo-Parthian dynasty ruled North-West India between 20 and 50 AD. The discovery of an ancient inscription in stone in a place called Takht-i-Bahi, North East of Peshawar in Pakistan, in 1872 helped historians to date his rule fairly firmly from 20 to 50 AD.¹² This window perfectly fits the scenario described in *Acts of Thomas*.

James Kurikilamkatt, an Indian Roman Catholic historian argues that the source of the present *Acts of Thomas* had “very probably an Indian origin.”¹³ He argues for two voyages of Thomas to India, the first to north India some time between 44 and 50 AD, and the second to South India in or after 52 AD.¹⁴

Though there are no irrefutable direct evidences to corroborate the claim of *Acts of Thomas* there are quite a few circumstantial evidences that point to the possibility of Thomas having had a mission to North West India before he came to South India. There still are a few Christians scattered in this region who fervently cling on to the tradition. It is indeed amazing that Christianity has survived in North West India in spite of the fact that there never was a royal patronage for Christians and the faith had to always struggle under hostile circumstances due to the innumerable invasions of many powers that came through this area culminating with the fury of the Islamic invasions.¹⁵ In spite of all these adverse circumstances a small remnant has survived to this day and in Taxila they

¹¹ Gundaphorus is spelled in various ways in various documents; Gondophares, Guduphares, Gondophernes, Undopherrou etc. are some of the variants.

¹² Stephen Neill gives the dates as AD 16 to AD 45. See Stephen Neill, *Christianity in India: The Beginnings*, 28.

¹³ James Kurikilamkatt, *The First Voyage of the Apostle Thomas to India: Ancient Christianity in Bharuch and Taxila* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2005), 221.

¹⁴ Note the title of Kurikilamkatt's book, *The **First** Voyage of Thomas to India* (Emphasis added)

¹⁵ Kurikilamkatt, *Voyage of Thomas*, 210.

celebrate every October 24 as the anniversary of the arrival of Saint Thomas.

Kurikilamkatt argues that with all these evidences we can no longer dismiss *all* of *Acts of Thomas* as pure fiction.¹⁶ Stephen Neill recognizes that “the historical coincidence is certainly remarkable; but it is important not to build on it a structure heavier than it will bear.”¹⁷ Samuel Hugh Moffett writes: “Positive assurance of the apostle’s Indian mission is as elusive as proof of the generally accepted mission of Peter to Rome.”¹⁸ One can safely conclude that even if Thomas himself did not arrive in North Western India there were Christians there from the early Christian era.

When we come to the South Indian tradition it is on a much stronger footing.¹⁹ Commenting on the plausibility of travel between Palestine and South India, Stephen Neill has written: “If the apostle Thomas, one of the twelve apostles of Jesus of Nazareth, had wished to take ship and go to India, there was nothing to prevent his doing so. Ample evidence exists to show the range and vigour of the commerce between India and the western world in the first two centuries of our era.”²⁰

And Samuel Hugh Moffett wrote:

. . . the abundant evidence now available that travel back and forth between India and the Roman Empire was far more commonplace in the first century than some earlier skeptics had once thought possible. The visit of a trade agent from an Indian king to Jerusalem and even a voyage to India by an apostle would have been not at all unusual. . . India was quite possibly more open to direct communication with the West in the first two centuries of the Christian era than in

¹⁶Kurikilamkatt, *Voyage of Thomas*, 40.

¹⁷ Neill, *Christianity in India: The Beginnings*, 28.

¹⁸ Moffett, *Christianity in Asia*, 1: 30-31.

¹⁹ See Mundadan, *History of Christianity in India*, 1: 23 for an impressive list of early references to the tradition.

²⁰ Neill, *Christianity in India: The Beginnings*, 30.

any other period of history before the coming of the Portuguese fifteen hundred years later.²¹

From the very beginnings the Christian communities of South India have proudly called themselves “Saint Thomas Christians.” Sure enough, the evidence is oral and traditional. “But the songs and poetry of a living community handed down from generation to generation sometimes strikes closer to the truth of ethnic and religious origins than the manuscripts and mutilated inscriptions.”²²

There are a number of songs that are sung by St. Thomas Christians even today that are supposedly handed down from the earliest days. Three of the most famous ones are: the *Rabban Pattu*, the *Veeradiyan Pattu*, and the *Margam Kali Pattu*.²³ All of these narrate the story of the arrival of the Apostle, how he converted several Brahmin families and baptized them (including the names of the families), and how seven churches were established by him (including the place names). Could all these be just legends?

Whether Apostle Thomas himself came to India or not the Church was present in southwest India from at least the end of the third century or early fourth century. We have concrete evidences for this.²⁴ Thus historic Christianity came to India very early on in Christian history, if not during the apostolic period itself.

²¹ Moffett, *Christianity in Asia*, 1: 31.

²² Moffett, *Christianity in Asia*, 1: 34.

²³ Mundadan, *History of Christianity in India*, 1:29. “Pattu” means song. *Veeradiyan* is a sub-caste of Hindus. Members of this caste were given the right to visit Christian homes and sing this song to remind them of their heritage and they made their living by this. I have fond memories of the yearly visit of an elderly *Veeradiyan* to our home.

²⁴ George Evers, *The Churches in Asia* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2005), 445.

Eastern Orthodox, Syrian Christian Tradition.

From the early days the Christians of southwest India maintained direct relationship with their fellow believers in Mesopotamia, Syria, Babylon, and Persia (hereafter referred to as Persian Church).²⁵ One of the names with which St. Thomas Christians are known even today is “Syrian Christians” (as opposed to “Latin Christians”- i.e. people who became Christians as a result of the work of Portuguese and other later Roman Catholic missionaries after the arrival of Vasco da Gama in 1498 and as a result use the “Latin Rite” for their worship). The name “Syrian Christians” originated because of the connection that the ancient Church had with fellow-believers in Persia and because of the liturgical language that was used in the Church for centuries- Syriac, the liturgical language of the Persian Church.

A Syriac commentary on the Epistle to the Romans produced in about 425 in Edessa (the modern Urfa in Turkey), one of the chief centers of Christianity in Eastern Syria, contains a reference to “Daniel the priest, the Indian,” who helped to translate the epistle from Greek to Syriac.²⁶ This reference not only gives us the name of the first Indian theological student known to us in history, but also gives us possible proof that the ecclesiastical language of the Indian Church was Syriac and not any Indian languages.²⁷

²⁵ “It is necessary to make clear that, whether the word used be Mesopotamia, East Syria, or Persia, the Church in question is one and the same. Its centre was actually in Mesopotamia; but Mesopotamia was politically part of Persia. More-over it was a Syriac-speaking Church, connected with Edessa, that early centre of Syriac Christianity, in East Syria.” C.B. Firth, *Indian Church History*, 23.

²⁶ Firth, *Indian Church History*, 21.

²⁷ Stephen Neill citing Dr. Percival Spear gives a very interesting (and probably accurate) explanation why Syriac was kept as the liturgical language of St. Thomas Christians for centuries even when many of the priests themselves did not understand what they were reciting. One of my own great uncle who was a priest in the Jacobite Orthodox Church recited the Syriac liturgy without really understanding a lot of what he

The testimony of a Christian merchant of Alexandria named Cosmas in his book *Universal Christian Topography* written around 522 gives us many interesting details about the Christian community in India and Ceylon (Sri Lanka).²⁸ He tells us that the Church existed in Malabar, “where the pepper grows”,²⁹ and in some other parts of India. It had at least one bishop in a place called “Kalliana” and he was consecrated in Persia. (Scholars are not sure whether “Kalliana” is Quilon (Kollam) in Kerala or Kalyan, near Mumbai.)³⁰

Another strong tradition that sheds light on the relationship of Christians in southwest India with those in Persia is the tradition of the migration of Thomas of Cana (*Knāyil*)³¹ According to this tradition this merchant led a large group of Christian immigrants from Jerusalem, Baghdad, and Nineveh to southwest India in the 4th century. Once again concrete proof is lacking for this tradition; and yet there are many circumstantial evidences to support it. There is a fairly large number of Christians in Kerala today that claim direct lineage to Thomas of Cana. This community of Christians

said. Neill writes on page 37 of *Christianity in India: The Beginnings*: “Through the centuries it (the Church of St. Thomas Christians) retained Syriac as its liturgical language, and never translated, in written form, into Malayalam, the language understood (sic) of the people, even so much as the liturgical Gospels. Dr. Percival Spear has given what is probably the correct explanation for this strange phenomenon- these were measures of self-protection. A small Christian community surrounded by masses of Hindus would be in constant danger of inanition by assimilation. Contact with a foreign country and the use of a foreign language would be elements of distinctiveness very useful in such a situation, just as the continued use of Welsh language has done much to preserve the distinctiveness of the remarkable community of Welsh farmers in Patagonia.”

²⁸ Firth, *Indian Church History*, 22-23. See also Stephen Neill, *Christianity in India: The Beginnings*, 38.

²⁹ Firth, *Indian Church History*, 22.

³⁰ Neill, *Christianity in India: The Beginnings*, 37.

³¹ Neill, *Christianity in India: The Beginnings*, 42. See also Mundadan, *History of Christianity in India*, 1: 90-98 for a detailed analysis of the tradition and description of the so-called ‘Northist-Southist’ division of Saint Thomas Christians supposedly stemming from the days of the children of the two wives of Thomas of Cana.

is known as *Knanāya Christians* and many of them refuse to inter-marry with Christians from other communities even today.

Another evidence for close relationship of Indian Christians with the Church in Persia is letters by Persian patriarchs to Indian bishops. A number of these letters from the seventh and eighth centuries have been found. These letters show that the Church in India was under the authority of the patriarchs of the Persian Church.³²

There is evidence to believe that in the seventh century this dependence declined a bit as the Nestorian patriarch granted the metropolitan in India freedom from the jurisdiction of the Persian metropolitan.³³ From then on there is an ebb and flow in the relationship to the point by the end of the fifteenth century “India’s ecclesiastical ties with any church outside India had all but reached the vanishing point.”³⁴ But the relationship never totally broke; there always was loyalty to the Syrian ecclesiastical authority. Just before the Portuguese discovered the sea route to India the relationship bloomed again.

In 1490, eight years before the arrival of Vasco da Gama in Calicut, a deputation of two Saint Thomas Christians, George and Joseph by names, went to Mar Simeon, Patriarch of the East, and asked him to send bishops to their country, which had been without bishops “for a long time.”³⁵ The Patriarch ordained the two as priests and sent them back with two bishops, Mar Thomas and Mar John. They were welcomed jubilantly

³² Mundadan refers to letters written by Persian patriarchs such as Mar Ishoyahb III (647/8 or 650/1) and Mar Timothy I (780- or 789-823). See *History of Christianity in India*, 1:100.

³³ Moffett, *Christianity in Asia*, 1:501.

³⁴ Moffett, *Christianity in Asia*, 1:501.

³⁵ Firth, *Indian Church History*, 43.

by the believers and these bishops “ordained many priests, because the Indians were for a long time without bishops.”³⁶

In 1503, just as the Portuguese were beginning to introduce Roman Catholicism to the Saint Thomas Christians in Cochin (see below), one metropolitan and two more bishops were sent by Mar Simeon’s successor, Mar Elias, to southwest India. A letter they wrote to the Patriarch of the East in 1504 is very enlightening and informative about the condition of Saint Thomas Christians at the time of the arrival of the Portuguese in India.

Now we would inform thy love that by the assistance of God and through thy accepted prayers, we arrived in the blessed country of India in good health. . . All the Christians this side were greatly pleased with us, and our Father Mar John is still alive and hale and sends thee his greetings. There are here about thirty thousand families of Christians,³⁷ our co-religionists, and they implore the Lord to grant thee a long life. They began to build new churches, are prosperous in every respect, and living in peace and security: May God be praised.³⁸

This renewed relationship and loyalty to the Patriarch of the East is one of the factors that led to the famous ‘Crooked Cross’ (“Coonan Kuris”) oath and break with Roman Catholicism on 3 January 1653.³⁹

Though the Indian Church has such a long and ancient history at least two factors made it “a lamp under a bushel”. Before we briefly mention these two factors as “self-

³⁶ Firth, *Indian Church History*, 43.

³⁷ From other available sources this number appears to be exaggerated.

³⁸ Firth, *Indian Church History*, 44.

³⁹ Neill, *Christianity in India: The Beginnings*, 319. It is really curious to see the present day condition of the “Coonan Kuris”; this important and historic symbol of the struggle of the St. Thomas Syrian Orthodox Christians to declare their independence from Roman Catholicism has been hijacked by the Catholic Church: the site is now a Roman Catholic pilgrimage place!

criticism”⁴⁰ we must acknowledge the miraculous nature of the survival of the St.

Thomas Christians for centuries in South India in spite of all the odds against them.

Two major factors that helped the community to survive must be its relationship with the

Persian Church and the Syriac liturgy.⁴¹ These “foreign connections” gave the Saint

Thomas Christians a unique cultural identity. This can be seen in the distinctive ways in

which they, particularly their women, dressed, and the way their places of worship were

constructed. These distinguishing marks gave the members of the community a sense of

belonging marking them as different from the Hindus all around them. This in turn

protected the community from being swallowed up by the highly syncretic Hindu society

in which it found itself. This “separation” of Saint Thomas Christians from the larger

community was essential for their survival as Christians. At the same time, sadly, the

community became “a lamp under a bushel” in two ways.

Not a Missionary Church

Saint Thomas Christians were not a missionary people. In the words of Stephen

Neill: “There is no clear evidence of attempts by the Indian Christian community to

propagate its faith in the non-Christian society in the midst of which it had its

existence.”⁴² The primary reason must be that the Church never had the Word of God in

⁴⁰ While these two points might sound “negative”, my goal in mentioning these is not to be judgmental or negative; as a member of the Syrian Christian community I strongly feel that we need to own up to the mistakes our ancestors made in order to learn from their errors and move forward. At the same I acknowledge that it is easy for us to sit in judgment of them with the advantage of hindsight; if we fully understood their circumstances we might come to different conclusions.

⁴¹ See footnote #27 above.

⁴² Neill, *Christianity in India: The Beginnings*, 49.

the language of the people. The liturgical language, Syriac, that gave the people their identity, became a trap for them.⁴³ Most believers, including some priests themselves, did not understand what they were reciting. As a result the believers never had concern for their non-Christian neighbors. We do not have any evidence of the Saint Thomas Christian community serving other communities in the name of Jesus by starting hospitals, orphanages or schools. Thus Gospel remained “a lamp under a bushel” all through the long history of the community until Protestant missionaries finally translated the Word of God in to Malayalam, the language of the people.

A Church That Was and Did Not Become the “Yeast” Influenced by the Hindu Culture and Caste System

More-over, from the evidence we have, we can also state that the Indian Christians were influenced by the Hindu caste system and became themselves part of this social evil instead of becoming the salt and light that the Lord of the Church desired her to become. In the words of the renowned Hindu scholar, K.P. Kesava Menon, Saint Thomas Christians had become: “Hindu in culture, Christian in religion, and oriental in worship.”⁴⁴ They became a caste themselves and remained for centuries without affecting the surrounding communities. Instead of being the “yeast that leavened the whole dough” (Matthew 13:33) the Church allowed itself to be influenced by the values and prejudices of the society.

⁴³ See footnote #27 above for one possible explanation why Syriac was kept as the liturgical language of Saint Thomas Christians and why not even Gospels were translated in to Malayalam.

⁴⁴ Moffett, *Christianity in Asia*, 1: 501.

Thus when the Saint Thomas Christians encountered the Roman Catholic Church through the arrival of the Portuguese they were largely nominal Christians who failed to positively affect the society at large.

Arrival of Roman Catholicism

The first Roman Catholic priest to set foot in India, as far as we know, is John of Montecorvino. It was in 1291 and he was on his way to Cathay.⁴⁵ He stayed in India for thirteen months, and according to his own records, he baptized about a hundred people in Mylapore where the tomb of St. Thomas is believed to be.

Vasco de Gama and the Portuguese

But the history proper of Roman Catholicism in India begins with the arrival of Vasco da Gama in Calicut, (a northern port city of present day Kerala; Malayalam: Kozhikode) on 28 May, 1498 with the statement: "We came in search of Christians and spices."⁴⁶ In 1501 a second landing took place in Calicut. Pedro Alvarez Cabral had come with six ships and nineteen missionaries, including eight Franciscans. Unfortunately this time relationship with the Zamorin, the Hindu ruler of Calicut, suffered irreparable damage because Cabral unleashed his cannons and savagely bombarded the city because

⁴⁵ Moffett, *Christianity in Asia*, 1: 499.

⁴⁶ Neill, *Christianity in India: The Beginnings*, 88, 91. See also Samuel Hugh Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia*, vol. 2, 1500-1900 (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2005), 4.

a riot had broken out when the Portuguese went ashore resulting in several deaths including that of three Franciscan missionaries.⁴⁷

Cochin (Kochi) as the Center of Portuguese Mission

So the Portuguese sailed further south. They were warmly welcomed by Saint Thomas Christians in their ancient center, Crangannore. During his second voyage, on 19 November 1502, a number of distinguished Saint Thomas Christians from Crangannore (Malayalam: Kodungallore) met da Gama and presented him with certain gifts. They told him that they represented a Christian population of 30,000 adults and expressed their desire that the king of Portugal would build a fort in their country.⁴⁸

As Crangannore is closer to the port at Cochin (Kochi), a much better port than Calicut, Portuguese decided to make that port their base of operation. Saint Thomas Christians were very happy to welcome the fellow-Christians from Portugal. One of them wrote around 1504: "The country of these Franks is called Portugal . . . and their king is called Emmanuel. May Emmanuel protect him!"⁴⁹ The king of Cochin also warmly welcomed the Portuguese as he was happy to hear that they were enemies of the Zamorin of Calicut.

Soon the Portuguese built a small fort in Cochin and it was dedicated on 1 November 1503 with a solemn mass.⁵⁰ A church building too was built and dedicated to

⁴⁷ Moffett, *Christianity in Asia*, 2:5.

⁴⁸ Neill, *Christianity in India: The Beginnings*, 93.

⁴⁹ Neill, *Christianity in India: The Beginnings*, 93.

⁵⁰ Neill, *Christianity in India: The Beginnings*, 113.

St. Bartholomew. This is the first church building in India built by Westerners. Even today this area of Cochin is known as Fort Cochin and a number of ‘Anglo-Indians’ (the common name by which descendants of mixed marriages between Westerners and Indians are known) still live in this area.

As the Portuguese influence grew in Cochin and surrounding areas missionary activities also grew. In a letter written on January 8, 1518 one Sebastian Pires reported to the Portuguese king that there were ten to twelve thousand Christians in and near Cochin (presumably new converts).⁵¹ In the same letter we see that the Portuguese were becoming aware of the caste system of Hindus and the higher castes such as Nāyars and the Brāhmans “who are of honorable rank” were not responding to the Gospel. Whereas Izhavas “who are less than honorable,” were responding to the preaching to the point that “the majority of them are now Christians.”⁵²

“Nova Roma”- Goa Becomes Portuguese Base

With the capture of Goa in 1510 by Affonso de Albuquerque that island became the center of operations for the Portuguese. Albuquerque eventually built up Goa to the point that it came to be known as “Nova Roma.”⁵³ Franciscans built a convent here and within a year had converted eight hundred non-Christians.⁵⁴ Eventually Goa became “the

⁵¹ Neill, *Christianity in India: The Beginnings*, 128.

⁵² Neill, *Christianity in India: The Beginnings*, Pires must be talking about a particular location as majority of Izhavas in Kerala are still Hindus.

⁵³ Neill, *Christianity in India: The Beginnings*, 96.

⁵⁴ Neill, *Christianity in India: The Beginnings*, 122.

largest diocese in the world geographically separated from Europe.”⁵⁵ Soon they realized that the evangelization of a large country like India could not be carried out by Portuguese missionaries alone. In a letter dated 8 November 1532 it was reported that in the fourteen years since the foundation of the convent in Goa twenty friars had died due to the heavy toll that the climate took. This drove the Franciscans to the conclusion that “if India is to be evangelized, this must be the work of those born in the land, who would be able to work with full vigor and with a continuity that foreigners were hardly able to supply.”⁵⁶

There was considerable opposition from some to the idea of admitting Indians to the priesthood. In 1531 the superiors of the Observant Province in Portugal sent out an order forbidding such admission.⁵⁷ But eventually they had to accept the reality that there was no way to have enough Portuguese priests to effectively preach the Gospel in such a large country as India.

First Roman Catholic Seminaries

The need for Indian priests eventually led to the founding of the first Roman Catholic seminaries in India.⁵⁸ The first such school came into existence in Cranganore in 1540 or 41.⁵⁹ It was named College of Santiago.⁶⁰ The vision was that of Vicente de

⁵⁵ Moffett, *Christianity in Asia*, 2: 8.

⁵⁶ Neill, *Christianity in India: The Beginnings*, 123.

⁵⁷ Neill, *Christianity in India: The Beginnings*, 123.

⁵⁸ These schools were not called seminaries; they were known as colleges.

⁵⁹ It is difficult to determine the exact year with certainty.

Lago, a Franciscan priest and a friend of the famous Francis Xavier. The primary purpose of the founding of the college was to latinize the local clergy and through them latinize and westernize the Saint Thomas Christians. An admirer of Vicente's work wrote:

The foundation of Vicente of a seminary exclusively for the St. Thomas Christians was attacking the problem in its face and it was the only solution acceptable to all. The St. Thomas Christians, so much attached to their ancient customs and usages, were much more fond of the native clergy than the European clergy, although the latter were of considerably much higher quality than the former.⁶¹

A saintly St. Thomas Christian leader by the name Mar Jacob also had high hopes about the college, but very different kind of hopes from that of Vicente and his friends. Though one of the three monks ordained by the Nestorian Patriarch Elias in 1503, and proudly a St. Thomas Christian, Mar Jacob became a friend of the Portuguese Roman Catholics and did much to link them with the Syrian Malabar churches.⁶² He wanted the St. Thomas Christians to have well trained priests.⁶³ He admired the training of the Franciscans and hoped that Vicente would help provide that kind of training to the young people of the St. Thomas Christian community. Though Vicente used the good offices of Mar Jacob to promote the new college and recruit students he totally ignored the wishes of this godly man when it came to the actual training of priests.

⁶⁰ "The very name of the college, 'College of Santiago', is proof enough that the spirit of the founding was not in keeping with the natural aspirations of the community for who the college was founded. . . The natural thing one would have expected is that the name of St. Thomas should have been given to the institution" Mundadan, 1:329.

⁶¹ Mundadan, *History of Christianity in India*, 1: 323.

⁶² Moffett, *Christianity in Asia*, 2: 7.

⁶³ Mundadan, *History of Christianity in India*, 1: 327.

The college was successful in that it had the support of all the Portuguese authorities both political and ecclesiastical. Francis Xavier himself wrote on January 20, 1545 to King John III of Portugal:

The college of Cranganore, which is the work of Father Friar Vicente, is waxing to youth with great increments; and if Your Majesty continues to favor him, as you have done so far, it will progress from good to better. Already there is good reason why many thanks are to be rendered to God on account of the immense fruit which already exists in this holy college as regards homage of Our Lord Christ. . . I pray and beseech for God's sake that Your Majesty favor him worthily showing your royal kindness and giving the alms he asks.⁶⁴

And again he wrote in 1549 to the Jesuit provincial in Portugal:

At five leagues from Cochin, in a fortress of the king, called Cranganore there is a famous college built by Fr. Vicente where he has about one hundred students, sons of those, that descend from the Christians whom St. Thomas converted, whom they call there St. Thomas Christians; and there are there sixty places of these Christians, and near these places is this college. Fr. Vicente is a great friend of mine.⁶⁵

Though the college was successful in that it trained a significant number of young St. Thomas Christians as priests due to their total latinization they were not accepted by the St. Thomas community. They learned only Latin mass. No liturgy other than Latin was taught or practiced.⁶⁶

Mundadan's words are instructive:

The college was a success in the sense that it produced many well-trained and good Latin priests from the community of St. Thomas Christians. But it failed miserably in its ultimate purpose, namely, of influencing the community of St. Thomas Christians through these latinized priests and of "converting" them to the acceptance of Latin customs, jurisdiction and Rite. The failure was in glaring contrast to the initial success.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Mundadan, *History of Christianity in India*, 1: 332.

⁶⁵ Mundadan, *History of Christianity in India*, 1: 333.

⁶⁶ Mundadan, *History of Christianity in India*, 1: 337.

⁶⁷ Mundadan, *History of Christianity in India*, 1:341.

The second seminary came into being in 1542 in Goa because of the leadership of Michael Vaz, the vicar general⁶⁸ and a secular priest Fr. Diogo Borba. They got permission from all the authorities including the King of Portugal and work of the seminary, named College of St. Paul, in honor of the apostle to the gentiles, began in June 1542 with sixty students drawn from Goa and its environs.⁶⁹ Most students were illiterate and therefore instruction had to start with teaching them how to read and write.⁷⁰ Thus formal theological training for Roman Catholic priests in India began in spite of the objection of many.

This is an example of a “fortunate subversion” that the Holy Spirit accomplished in the thinking of His servants in spite of themselves.⁷¹ National workers are the key for successful evangelization, church planting and strengthening of the Church in any country. The apostles did not hesitate to appoint elders in the newly planted churches that they started and that must be our example (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5).

Yet this idea was not self-evident to all ecclesiastical authorities in the 16th and 17th centuries. Francis Ingoli, the first secretary of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, more commonly known as Propaganda Fide, established by Pope Gregory XV on 6 January 1622, had to argue fiercely for the ordination of

⁶⁸ In the absence of bishops vicar generals were appointed by the pope to take care of Church affairs in India. The first vicar general was appointed in 1514. Even after bishops were ordained later vicar generals exercised much power. Michael Vaz served as the vicar general from 1532 to 1547 and was the first strong supporter of missionary work among non-Christians. See Mundadan, *History of Christianity in India*, 1:242 and Stephen Neill, *Christianity in India: The Beginnings*, 115.

⁶⁹ Mundadan, *History of Christianity in India*, 1: 463.

⁷⁰ Though it was named “College” and the founders were hoping it to produce priests, it had to begin as a primary school as most of the students were of mixed-race heritage and “ill-instructed and ill-disciplined”. See C.B. Firth, *Indian Church History*, 58 and Stephen Neill, *Christianity in India: The Beginnings*, 123-124.

⁷¹ Andrew Walls, “Missionary Societies and the Fortunate Subversion of the Church,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 88 no. 2 (1988): 141-155.

indigenous bishops and priests *eighty years later* as many in the Roman Catholic Church were evidently still not enthusiastic about ordaining indigenous clergy.

Stephen Neill summarizes well Ingoli's arguments that he built on the above mentioned apostolic practice of ordaining elders wherever they established churches.

The ordination of indigenous priests and the consecration of indigenous bishops will be the best method for rescuing the missions from paralysis into which many of them have fallen. . . . If we do ordain nationals to the priesthood, we shall be doing no more than what the apostles did, and their practice is to be followed since it was dictated by the Holy Spirit. The exclusion of the native races from the priesthood is the greatest hindrance to the spread of the Gospel, since the unreached provinces can more easily be converted by the citizens of these countries than by foreigners, who are not held in great esteem in those areas.⁷²

This is not an issue that plagued the Church in India centuries ago; it is still alive and well even today. Of course the Church in India today, whether Roman Catholic, Protestant, Pentecostal, or Independent are all under national leadership. But when we closely look at the leadership of most of these groups we will see that top level leadership positions are, by and large, mostly in the hands of South Indians (except in North-East India). Indigenous leadership is still sorely lacking in many areas. (I write these words as a South Indian who is leading a ministry in North India). For the Church in India to reach its full potential we need to empower more indigenous leadership at the local level. As India is home to 4,693 ethnic groups penetrating these ethnic groups and planting healthy congregations among them will depend on effectively developing leaders from among these groups. This is a difficult task and it would take leaders who have wisdom and vision like Francis Ingoli.

⁷² Neill, *Christianity in India: The Beginnings*, 335. It is interesting to note that Pope Gregory XIII (1572-85) specifically laid down an edict forbidding the ordination of descendants of Muslim converts unless their families have been Christians for four generations. See Stephen Neill, *Christianity in India: The Beginnings*, 450.

Francis Xavier and the Mission to the Fisher-Folks

The arrival of Francis Xavier on May 6, 1542 in Goa with a small party of companions marks the beginning of a new chapter in the history of Roman Catholic missions in India. His simple methods of instructing new believers in the Christian faith is a good example to follow even today, particularly when we are dealing with illiterate and semi-literate people who are coming to the faith.

The first mass movement to Christian faith had taken place in the Coromandel Coast in 1535. Perhaps as many as eighty thousand or so fisher folks belonging to the Bharatha caste⁷³ became Christians to escape from the attacks of marauding Muslim fleets.⁷⁴ Though they had become Christians nothing was done for them by the Church until the arrival of Xavier. In 1542 Xavier accompanied by three Indian priests went to Cape Comorin to work among them.

Xavier's method of ministry was very simple. He had the foundational documents of the faith such as the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, Ten Commandments and few other important prayers translated into Tamil and written in Tamil characters. At first he himself memorized these in Tamil (with the help of Roman script as he did not know Tamil script). Then he would travel from hamlet to hamlet, with a bell in his hand and with young children constantly accompanying him.⁷⁵ In each hamlet he would gather as

⁷³ They are commonly called Paravas by the so-called high castes; they prefer the name Bharathas.

⁷⁴ Moffett, *Christianity in Asia*, 2: 10-11. Stephen Neill gives a much lower number, 20,000. See 142. But this is higher than the ten thousand he had cited in his *History of Christian Missions* (London: Penguin, 1990), 127. Neill refers to "the absurd report sent by Michael Vaz to the pope to the effect that half a million new Christians had been added to the church." See *Christianity in India: The Beginnings*, 454, n. 33.

⁷⁵ One of his diary notes read: "The boys besieged me in such crowds that I had no time to say my office or to eat or to sleep. They clamoured to be taught some prayers. . . I found them very quick and bright, and, if

many people as possible around him and helped them to memorize the Lord's Prayer and other basic teachings of the faith through constant repetition. He also instructed the boys to teach their parents what they learned from him. Often he would visit the same village twice a day. Later he appointed *kanakkappillai*⁷⁶ who were paid a small annual salary and through them multiplied himself.⁷⁷ On Sundays he would gather all the villagers together and ask them to repeat what they learned. Through such patient persistence Xavier succeeded in transforming the illiterate Bharathas into good Roman Catholics. Xavier was the only effective missionary on the Coast and his success is due to his patient endurance and his willingness to identify with the poor fisher-folk.

Robert Nobili and Mission of Mathurai

Another very important figure among the Roman Catholic missionaries is the famous Robert Nobili, a Jesuit priest who was "an Italian aristocrat, nephew of a cardinal." He arrived in India on May 20, 1605 and made India his home for the next fifty years.⁷⁸ After a brief time in Cochin where he almost died and a short stint in the Fisher Coast he was appointed to go to Mathurai, an ancient Dravidian city that was a great center of Tamil culture and where stood one of the most famous Hindu temples in India,

they had someone to instruct them properly in our holy faith, I am sure they would make fine Christians." See Stephen Neill, *Christianity in India: The Beginnings*, 144.

⁷⁶ Literally 'accountant', a person entrusted with the task of teaching believers the basics of the faith and keeping track of the numbers of the ones who were taught. See Stephen Neill, *Christianity in India: The Beginnings*, 145.

⁷⁷ Neill, *Christianity in India: The Beginnings*, 145.

⁷⁸ Neill, *Christianity in India: The Beginnings*, 280.

Mīnākṣi with its four *gopurams*⁷⁹ and thousands of idols on them.⁸⁰ Here in this Hindu holy city Nobili arrived on November 15, 1606 and he lived and ministered in Mathurai for almost five decades and his career is “marked by originality unsurpassed by any missionary in India before or after his time.”⁸¹

Father Fernandez, a Portuguese missionary, was in Mathurai for eleven years before Nobili arrived there. Nobili soon learned that in eleven years Fernandez was not able to win a single high-caste Hindu to the Christian faith. Nobili was determined to discover the reason and win Brāhmans and other high-caste Hindus. What he learned totally changed him in every possible way. He soon discovered that almost everything the Portuguese missionary did was repulsive to a high caste Hindu- wearing leather shoes, eating with knife and fork, drinking wine, eating meat- especially beef- the list went on. Nobili decided that if he was to win high caste Hindus, especially Brāhmans, to Christ he must give up his European ways of life and live like them. He was prepared to do anything to accomplish his mission. He wrote reflecting Pauline language: “I too will make myself Indian in order to save some Indians.”⁸²

He asked for permission to move to a different city thinking that it would be easier for him to begin anew in a place where there is no prejudice created by a person like Fernandez. But permission was not granted. So Nobili set out to conduct his grand experiment wearing clothes like that of a Hindu *sannyāsi*, wearing wooden sandals and

⁷⁹ Word means tower.

⁸⁰ Neill, *Christianity in India: The Beginnings*, 279-280.

⁸¹ Neill, *Christianity in India: The Beginnings*, 280.

⁸² Moffett, *Christianity in Asia*, 2: 21.

eating a strict vegetarian diet.⁸³ He had to separate himself from Fernandez and the few Christians who were there in Mathurai as they were from the so-called lower castes. He publicly declared that he was not a *parangi*⁸⁴ but an Italian nobleman, equivalent to a Kshatriya.⁸⁵

Nobili would spend many days discussing and disputing with Brāhmans. He spent four or five hours every day for twenty days debating with his Tamil teacher who was from the Nayak (ruling) caste. At the end of twenty days his teacher declared that he was convinced of the superiority of Christianity and asked to be baptized. Before Nobili completed one year in Mathurai he baptized ten high-caste Hindus.⁸⁶ Between 1607 and 1611 he baptized 108 high-caste Hindus. This was remarkable success. Nobili never demanded that his converts forsake their caste rules, culture or life-style as it was done by the Portuguese in Goa. Only idolatry was forbidden. Nobili even allowed the wearing of the sacred thread and the hair-tuft (*kudumi*). He wrote in a letter in 1609: "By becoming a Christian one does not renounce his caste, nobility or usages. The idea that Christianity interferes with them has been impressed upon the people by the devil, and is the great obstacle to Christianity. It is this that has stricken the work of Fr. Fernandez with sterility."⁸⁷

⁸³ Neill, *Christianity in India: The Beginnings*, 281.

⁸⁴ The term *parangi* or Franks described any European especially the Portuguese, a derogatory term for many. "It was not a complimentary term; it suggested meat-eating, wine-drinking, loose-living, arrogant persons, whose manners were so far removed from Indian propriety that social intercourse with them was unthinkable." Fernandez preached Christianity as *parangi margam* which means the way of the *parangi*. No wonder he did not win any converts from high-caste Hindus! See C.B. Firth, *Indian Church History*, 111.

⁸⁵ The warrior/ruling caste of Hinduism, the second highest caste.

⁸⁶ Firth, *Indian Church History*, 112.

⁸⁷ Firth, *Indian Church History*, 114.

He also avoided the tragic mistake of creating mission compounds; he encouraged his converts to stay in their own homes. Surprisingly Nobili changed his converts' names to Western names thus showing his "accommodation" had its limits.⁸⁸

He was able to influence a number of Jesuit missionaries to follow his methods. About thirty Jesuits eventually joined him. By 1700 the Roman Catholic community of Christians in Mathurai grew to over 150,000 and was second only to that in Goa.⁸⁹

But Nobili's methods also faced much criticism. He was accused of syncretism and even of becoming a Hindu. Nobili was a deeply committed Christian who passionately believed in his mission. Later in his ministry he found ways to bring more balance in his methods and not to totally ignore the so-called low-castes as they too needed the gospel. Yet the critics were not satisfied. Organized opposition to the Malabar Rites, as the accommodations came to be known, eventually resulted in Papal censure in 1734.⁹⁰

Yet the legacy of Nobili lives on and there is much to learn from his sincere desire to present the gospel to the high-caste Hindus and win them for Christ. His desire was to free Christianity from reproach of foreignness. This is still, after more than nineteen centuries, the greatest handicap of the Indian Church. We are still not presenting the gospel in 'Indian cups' as the famous Indian saint Sadhu Sunder Singh⁹¹ exhorted us to do. How then can we be too critical of this Italian nobleman for trying? Later the Indian

⁸⁸ Neill, *Christianity in India: The Beginnings*, 283.

⁸⁹ Moffett, *Christianity in Asia*, 2: 22.

⁹⁰ There are many similarities between Nobili's ministry and fellow Jesuit Matteo Ricci's ministry in China. See Samuel Hugh Moffett, *Christianity in Asia*, 1: 22-23.

⁹¹ A.J. Appasamy, *Sundar Singh* (Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1960).

theologian Brahmabāndhav Upādhyāy tried the same and was misunderstood and criticized by many.⁹²

Nobili and his disciples did go too far in their enthusiasm. Their main mistake was not seeing the evil-side of the caste system and accepting caste system into the Church without seriously purging the evils inherent in the system. But in defense of these Jesuits one must say that it is an extremely difficult task, a task that still needs to be tackled and solved.

Decline and Regeneration of Roman Catholic Mission/Church

For a period of about seventy years Roman Catholic mission work fell into decay from 1759, the year in which the Jesuits were expelled from Portugal and its colonies.⁹³ Along with the cessation of Jesuit missionary activities the power of Portugal and Spain also was declining. Another reason for the weakening of Roman Catholic Mission was the Napoleonic Wars on France. Further, the Roman Catholic Church in India faced difficult days due to the persecution of Christians by Tippoo Sultan and controversies over the Malabar Rites.

Revival of Roman Catholic missionary work began under Pope Gregory XVI. He became Pope in 1831. He ordered the creation of new vicariates in order to better organize the Church. As a result there was severe conflict between Gregory XVI on the one side and the government of Portugal and the Goan clergy on the other (known as

⁹² See Timothy C. Tennent, *Building Christianity on Indian Foundations: The Legacy of Brahmabāndhav Upādhyāy* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2000).

⁹³ Firth, *Indian Church History*, 215; See also Kenneth Scott Latourette, *The Great Century: North Africa and Asia AD 1800-AD 1914*, vol. 6 of *A History of the Expansion of Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974), 71-74.

‘Goan Schism’).⁹⁴ Portuguese and Goan clergy argues that the Pope had no right to overthrow the Padroado.⁹⁵ Conflict at times became very ugly and resulted in physical violence, police action and court cases until it was resolved in 1860.

In the meantime new Jesuit missionaries from various European countries started arriving in India as the Society of Jesus was restored by Pope Pius VII in 1814. There was a renewal of missionary zeal among Roman Catholics in many European countries and England. A new phenomenon in the 19th century was the rise of Women’s Orders which began to make very significant contributions to the growth and development of congregations.

Significant progress was also made in the training of Indian clergy towards the end of the 19th century and early 20th century. The seminary that was started by Francis Xavier of St. Anne to train indigenous clergy in the South was made a major seminary in 1888 and was put directly under the Propaganda.⁹⁶ In 1890 Pope Leo XIII decided to found a papal seminary, equal in quality to any in Europe, to train secular priests for India and Ceylon (Sri Lanka). It was started in 1893 in Kandy, Sri Lanka and in 1954 moved to Poona.⁹⁷ At the same time Jesuits established two colleges for the training of the members of their society: one in Bengal in 1889 and another in South India in 1895.⁹⁸

The Syrian Christians who submitted to papal authority were finally given full recognition as a unique group in 1923 by Pope Pius XI by the creation of an ecclesiastical

⁹⁴ Moffett, *Christianity in Asia*, 2: 431.

⁹⁵ Firth, *Indian Church History*, 217; Kenneth Scott Latourette, *The Great Century*, 75.

⁹⁶ Latourette, *The Great Century*, 79.

⁹⁷ Firth, *Indian Church History*, 227.

⁹⁸ Firth, *Indian Church History*, 227.

province of Syrian Christians known as the Syro-Malabar Church. Thus it became “a fully-fledged Uniat⁹⁹ Church having a hierarchy of its own.”¹⁰⁰

Today, though Roman Catholics are rather small as a percentage of the Indian population, the Church is a very influential power in India. The contributions that the Church has made in the fields of education, medical care, and other social development projects are very significant. There is hardly any city or principal town in India where there is not an excellent school run by nuns or priests. Even those Hindus who might not like Christians prefer to send their children to convent schools for education. It is very common to find in matrimonial advertisements seeking brides for their sons published by ardent Hindus a clause like: “convent educated girls preferred”.

Some of the top political offices in the country are now held by Roman Catholics. Mrs. Sonia Gandhi, the President of the Indian National Congress, the political party that controls the present government, is a Catholic.¹⁰¹ Mr. A.K. Antony, the defense minister of India, is a Roman Catholic from Kerala.

The sacrificial and dedicated services of the thousands of priests and nuns of the Church are to be commended.

⁹⁹ Uniat means ‘Of or relating to any of several Eastern Christian churches that are in communion with the Roman Catholic Church but retain their own languages, rites, and codes of canon law.’

¹⁰⁰ Firth, *Indian Church History*, 231.

¹⁰¹ It needs to be said that Mrs. Gandhi is an Italian by birth and is in her powerful position because she married Rajeev Gandhi, the grandson of India’s first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, and son of Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the first female Prime Minister of India.

Protestant Christianity in India

Protestant mission had its beginning in India with the Tranquebar missions of Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg and Heinrich Plütschau, who reached Tranquebar on the Coromandel Coast, approximately 250 kilometers south of Chennai on July 9, 1706.¹⁰² Though the Tranquebar mission had the blessing and support of King Frederick IV of Denmark Protestant mission was largely voluntary, independent, self-supporting “faith missions” unlike the Roman Catholic mission, officially sanctioned and supported by governments such as that of Portugal.¹⁰³

British East India Company and Missions

The dominant Western power in India from the second half of 18th century on, the British East India Company, was at times actively antagonistic to missions. During the parliamentary debates of 1793 William Wilberforce, the evangelical social reformer, argued for more access to Christian missionaries to India. But his proposals were vigorously opposed by the Directors of the Company and their supporters in the parliament and eventually defeated. This opposition is what led to the founding of the famous Serampore mission by William Carey and his colleagues in Serampore, a Danish territory near Calcutta (Kolkata). Carey could not get permission from East India Company either to go to India as a missionary or to sail in an English ship.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² We will be dealing more with the work of Ziegenbalg and his colleagues in Chapter Three.

¹⁰³ Moffett, *Christianity in Asia*, 2: 256.

¹⁰⁴ Firth, *Indian Church History*, 146-147.

Wilberforce did not give up his determination to open the door for mission work in India. He succeeded in obtaining a provision for an Anglican ecclesiastical establishment of a bishop and three archdeacons when the charter of the East India Company was renewed in 1813.¹⁰⁵ This in effect gave freedom for missionaries to live and work in territories controlled by the Company.¹⁰⁶ Another revision of the charter in 1833 removed restrictions that had affected non-British societies.¹⁰⁷

As we will be dealing with both the Tranquebar and Serampore mission extensively in chapter three we will not dwell on those topics here. The Tranquebar and Serampore missionaries firmly laid the foundation for Protestant missions in India in spite of the political opposition.

Progress in Spite of Opposition- LMS in the South

During the early days of Serampore mission and while East Indian Company was still opposed to missionary activities in the country several daring men entered India to preach the Gospel. Among these were the London Missionary Society missionaries Nathaniel Forsyth who worked and died in Bengal and W. T. Ringeltaube, a German Lutheran who was educated in Halle and influenced by Moravian Pietism. He reached India in 1806.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ Latourette, *The Great Century*, 108.

¹⁰⁶ Firth, *Indian Church History*, 159.

¹⁰⁷ Firth, *Indian Church History*, 160.

¹⁰⁸ Latourette, *The Great Century*, 151.

Ringeltaube pioneered LMS mission in the southern-most corner of India in what was then known as the Kingdom of Travancore.¹⁰⁹ He met a recent convert by the name of Vedamanikam, a remarkable man from the Sāmbavar caste. He was a literate land-owner who had set out searching for truth and became a Christian in Tanjore and was baptized. Through his testimony a number of his family members came to the faith and he was searching for someone to give them baptism when he met Ringeltaube. Vedamanikam proved to be an effective co-worker for the missionary. Both of them were tireless workers and a significant number of Sāmbavar caste became believers.¹¹⁰

In 1810 another caste, the Nādārs, began to respond to the Gospel. Under the ministry of Ringeltaube's successor, Charles Mead, there was a significant mass movement of Nādārs to the faith which continued throughout the 19th century. These believers form one of the largest dioceses of the Church of South India today, the Kanyakumari diocese.¹¹¹

Ringeltaube's life and ministry were exemplary. He lived in extreme simplicity. His home was a little thatched house. He often gave away most of his meager stipend that there were times he had nothing to eat. He wore tattered clothes. Some thought that he was an eccentric. His evaluation of his own ministry was not very optimistic. In 1813 he wrote: "I have now about 600 Christians. . . Three or four may have a longing for their salvation. The rest have come from all sorts of motives, which we can only know after years have passed."¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Latourette, *The Great Century*, 108; C.B. Firth, *Indian Church History*, 155.

¹¹⁰ Firth, *Indian Church History*, 156-157.

¹¹¹ Firth, *Indian Church History*, 157-158.

¹¹² Firth, *Indian Church History*, 157-158.

But history proved him wrong. The work he pioneered is one of the strongest in India. Today the believers in southern Tamil Nadu where most of his labors were concentrated are some of the most missionary minded Christians in India. There are a number of very strong congregations there that have great missionary zeal. For example, Friends Missionary Prayer Band, perhaps the strongest indigenous missionary organization in India, draws most of its personnel and financial support from Christians in Tamil Nadu.

Revival Among Syrian Christians

The Portuguese tried to impose their views and ways on the Saint Thomas Christians. At first the Saint Thomas Christians were very positive towards the Portuguese. But the relationship soured especially after the ruthless Archbishop of Goa, Alexis de Menzes, manipulated the Synod of Diamper (Udayamperur) that took place on June 20, 1599, and by force imposed his views on them. The break with the Portuguese and Roman Catholic Church resulted in the famous Crooked Cross Oath (Coonan Kuris) on January 3, 1653 when thousands of Syrian Christians gathered outside a church in Mattancheri (Cochin) and swore an oath on the stone cross. As the crowd was too large for everyone to touch the cross a rope was tied to the cross and people held on to it and took the oath that they will never associate themselves with the Portuguese or the Roman Catholics. The cross became 'crooked' due to the pull of the people and thus the famous name.

Syrian Christians had a difficult time as they did not have properly consecrated bishops. Portuguese made sure that the Persian Church could not send any bishops to

them. Twelve of their priests together consecrated their arch deacon Thomas as their bishop in May 1653 and he took the name Mar Thoma I.¹¹³ But most considered his consecration invalid.

Soon Portugal lost their power as the Dutch defeated them and took Cochin from them in 1663. They expelled all the Portuguese and Italian priests working among the Saint Thomas Christians. This opened a way for the Saint Thomas Christians to get connected with the Patriarch of Antioch and he sent the Metropolitan of Jerusalem to India. He arrived in 1665 and thus the Church in India was once again connected to the Church in the East, though this time the metropolitan that came was a Jacobite.¹¹⁴

In the latter part of the 18th century the relative peace and prosperity in which the Saint Thomas Christians lived was shattered by the invasion of Tippoo Sultan in 1789. Thousands of Christians were killed and many church buildings were destroyed by Tippoo including the ancient cathedral of Angamali.¹¹⁵ Many Christians were hung on trees around their churches. Finally the British defeated Tippoo in 1799.

The arrival of the British brought a time of peace and revival for the Saint Thomas Christians. The first two residents were both godly Protestants- Colonel Macaulay and Colonel Munro. They both strongly supported the Saint Thomas Christians.¹¹⁶

In 1806 it was reported by Richard Kerr, the senior chaplain of Madras Government, that there were 70,000 to 80,000 Jacobite Christians in Travancore and that

¹¹³ Firth, *Indian Church History*, 102.

¹¹⁴ Time and space does not permit us here to enter into an exposition of the complicated doctrinal differences of the Jacobites and Nestorians.

¹¹⁵ Firth, *Indian Church History*, 166.

¹¹⁶ Firth, *Indian Church History*, 166.

they were respected by the king of and the high-caste Hindus. The same year Claudius Buchanan visited the Saint Thomas Christians and encouraged the translation of the Bible into Malayalam. Mar Dionysius, the ruling bishop, took his suggestion gladly and the Gospels were translated into Malayalam.

This had momentous impact on the Saint Thomas Christians. The reformation that followed and the formation of the Mar Thoma Church are directly the result of the Word of God becoming available in the language of the people.

Following the visit of Buchanan, the Church of England took an active interest in Saint Thomas Christians. A number of great missionaries arrived in present day Kerala and began to work among the Christians with the goal of helping the Syrian Church. In the words of Buchanan their purpose was “to promote its (Syrian Church’s) welfare, to revive its spirit and to use it as an instrument of good in British India”.¹¹⁷

Colonel Monroe took an active role in helping the founding of a seminary in Kottayam to train the Syrian clergy and it opened in 1815 (now known as Old Seminary) three years before Carey opened Serampore college.¹¹⁸ At first CMS missionaries taught in the seminary. Relationship between missionaries and the Metran was so good that Joseph Fenn, a missionary who arrived in 1818 served as the principal and manager of the seminary for a while.

British missionaries did hope that the Saint Thomas Christians would join the Church of England. Eventually when a few of the younger people did join, friction rose between the two groups and the relationship broke. It must be said that the English missionaries contributed much to the strengthening of the Saint Thomas Christian

¹¹⁷ Firth, *Indian Church History*, 167.

¹¹⁸ Firth, *Indian Church History*, 168.

community by starting schools everywhere that the community became one of the most literate communities in the whole country.

The hard work of the missionaries is paying off even now that thousands of Saint Thomas Christians are serving the Lord in every nook and corner of India as missionaries, teachers, doctors, nurses and in many other capacities.

Christianity in Northeast India

The portion of the country that lies to the north and east of Bangladesh is known as Northeast India. It consists of seven sister states- Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Tripura.¹¹⁹ The ethnic composition of this area is predominantly Mongolian. It is estimated that around fifty languages are spoken here with as many as 150 minor dialects.¹²⁰ Over 200 scheduled tribes call this area home.

It must be noted at the outset that the Northeast Indian tribes were never significantly influenced by Hinduism. Most of them were animistic in their theology. Idol worship, the predominant feature of Hinduism, was hardly known in these parts of India. As a result the people of the Northeast were not as resistant to the gospel as most Hindus in mainland India.

¹¹⁹ K.M. George, *Christianity in India through the Centuries* (Hyderabad: Authentic, 2007), 154.

¹²⁰ George, *Christianity in India*, 154.

Beginnings of Mission Work in Northeast

As far as recorded history goes, the first Christians to reach this area are two Tibetan-born Portuguese Jesuit missionaries, Stephen Casell and John Cabral, who visited the area in September 1626 on their way to Tibet.¹²¹

The very first Protestant attempt to reach the Northeast with the Gospel was undertaken by the Serampore mission. In 1811 an Assamese pundit, Atmaram Sarma of Kaiabar, was employed by the mission to translate the Bible into Assamese. The New Testament was published in Assamese in 1819 and the whole Bible in 1833.¹²² But like many Serampore translations it proved to be not beneficial and American Baptist missionaries had to make a new translation later.

Krishna Chandra Pal, the first convert of the Serampore mission, worked among the Khasi tribe for eight months in 1813 and baptized seven persons including one Assamese and two Khasi named U Duwan and U Anna. These are the first two known believers from among the indigenous people of Northeast.¹²³ Unfortunately they may have gone back due to persecution and lack of care as Serampore did not maintain effective contacts with the new converts. But Carey did translate the New Testament into the Khasi language through the help of an unknown pundit and 500 copies of New

¹²¹ George, *Christianity in India*, 155.

¹²² Frederick S. Downs, *North East India in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, vol. v, part 5 of *History of Christianity in India*, (Bangalore: The Church History Association of India, 1992), 65-66.

¹²³ Downs, *North East India*, 66; C.B. Firth, *Indian Church History*, 267.

Testament were printed in 1824. Serampore also had the New Testament translated into the Manipuri language in 1827.

In 1829 through the encouragement of David Scott, one of Carey's students in Fort William College who became a commissioner in the British administration in Assam, a school was opened in Guwahati.¹²⁴ An evangelist also was appointed here. But the work was closed down in 1837 or 1838 and the property was given to the American Baptist Missionary Union. The headquarters of the Council of Baptist Churches in Northeast India (CBCNEI) and several related agencies as well as Guwahati Baptist Church are presently situated on this site.

David Scott and Francis Jenkins who followed him were both evangelicals and did all they could to encourage mission work in Northeast.¹²⁵ Scott was able to persuade the government to provide grants to open schools among the fierce Garo tribe of Assam and appoint missionaries as teachers. The first such school was opened in early 1827 in a place called Singimari.¹²⁶ The Singimari school was closed after two years because Scott was killed in the Anglo-Khasi war.¹²⁷

The next commissioner, Francis Jenkins, made more substantial contributions to missions. The son of an English clergyman with strong evangelical convictions he helped with the start of the first two permanent Protestant missions in Assam, the American

¹²⁴ Downs, *North East India*, 37.

¹²⁵ Downs, *North East India*, 33.

¹²⁶ George, *Christianity in India*, 157.

¹²⁷ Downs, *North East India*, 33.

Baptist Mission and the Welsh Presbyterian Mission.¹²⁸ These two missions are responsible for two-thirds of Christians in the Northeast today.

Two missionary families, Nathan and Eliza Brown and Oliver and Harriet Cutter of the American Baptist Mission arrived in Sadiya, in Upper Assam in early 1836.¹²⁹ With the help of government grants they started schools for the tribal children.

The Welsh Calvinistic Methodists (later renamed Welsh Presbyterians)¹³⁰ chose the Northeast almost by an “accident”. While trying to decide whether to send missionaries to Gujarat or the North East, an unidentified benefactor offered inexpensive passage for their missionaries to Calcutta. That offer persuaded the mission to choose the North East. Thus Thomas Jones and his wife arrived in Cherrapunji, “the rainiest inhabited place on earth,” on June 2, 1841.¹³¹ They too followed the pattern of starting schools for illiterate children and preaching the Gospel. Response to the Gospel was very slow. In five years there were only fifteen members in the church. Given the rapid growth of Church in the later years this might come as a surprise to us.¹³²

But slowly the Gospel took root. There are many heroic stories of Khasi believers who sacrificed much to become Christians. U Borsing, heir of the chieftainship (*syiemship*) of Cherrapunji, is one of those. He not only lost his chieftainship but also all

¹²⁸ Downs, *North East India*, 38.

¹²⁹ Downs, *North East India*, 39.

¹³⁰ Firth, *Indian Church History*, 268.

¹³¹ Downs, *North East India*, 72.

¹³² This needs to be a lesson for those of us who are struggling in north India to see people coming to the Lord. It is not wise to discard a field too soon labeling it “not responsive.” Some of my colleagues struggled for years to see one person coming to the Lord in villages in eastern UP. But now those same villages have hundreds of baptized believers worshipping the Lord. Persistence is necessary in planting churches in north India.

his personal property for the sake of the Gospel.¹³³ The Khasi believers had very little to gain by accepting Christianity. By 1891 there were 2,147 members in the Khasi churches.

Membership standards were high. One of the criteria was that a member must know how to read. This rule was relaxed only in the cases of those who were too old to learn.¹³⁴ The Baptist churches also were making steady progress. While there were only 54 communicants in 1861, by 1900 there were 6,636 members. During the last decade of the 19th century missionary work by Protestants extended to two new areas both of which became important Christian centers: Mizoram and the hill areas of Manipur.¹³⁵

The general policy that the British government adopted in this area is that the tribal people do not have any religion and therefore it is permissible to give grants to the missionaries to start schools and teach their children and use the schools as a means to teach religion as well. 'No interference with religion' policy did not apply here as the tribals had no religion; it applied only when it came to Hinduism and Islam.¹³⁶ This policy decision greatly helped missionaries not only to start schools and bring education to the illiterate tribals but also to freely preach the gospel and convert people to Christianity without fearing interference from the authorities.

While acknowledging the great help rendered by men in high places of the British government the missionaries also record hindrances to the gospel caused by the loose living of many Westerners.¹³⁷ The authorities did not limit their help to Protestant

¹³³ Downs, *North East India*, 73.

¹³⁴ Downs, *North East India*, 75.

¹³⁵ Downs, *North East India*, 83.

¹³⁶ Downs, *North East India*, 41.

¹³⁷ Downs, *North East India*, 47.

missionaries. When two Roman Catholic missionaries belonging to the Paris Mission arrived in Guwahati in 1850 they were given all kinds of help by the authorities.¹³⁸

At the same time missionaries knew that the government was using them for their political gains. The words written by a senior missionary, Miles Bronson, are very instructive:

The total change in the policy of the East India Govt. referred to, is imaginary. Here and there, 'few and far between' may indeed be found pious British Officers, who in their private capacity have aided Missions and felt true Christian sympathy for the degraded and barbarous tribes around. But the Govt. *as such* is unaltered in its spirit of abnegation of God and Christianity to this day. Whatever changes the Govt. has conceded in favour of Christianity the days of Buchanan and Carey have been wrenched from them. . . For *mere political ends*, where missionaries serve as an entering wedge among some barbarous tribe, as civilizers and educators, (and) as informers, missionaries may receive countenance, but for no higher motive.¹³⁹

Though the missionaries knew that the government was using them for political purposes they nonetheless utilized the help they received to accomplish their goals. In the early days of mission work in the Northeast, especially among the hill tribes, mission schools run with government aid played a crucial role in evangelization.

The modus operandi was to persuade a non-Christian village to have a school for their children. (In many cases the villagers asked for a school). Then a Christian school-master, one who is trained in a mission school, will be appointed with the express understanding that his duties included not just teaching the three R's to the children but preaching the gospel to their parents as well. When people responded to the preaching the school-master became their pastor and a church was born. This was one of the most effective methods, though not the only method, that was used in the hills. As a result in

¹³⁸ Downs, *North East India*, 48.

¹³⁹ Downs, *North East India*, 49-50; emphasis in the original.

the minds of most hills people education and Christianity came to be regarded as synonymous. It is reported that people of the Garo tribe thought of a child that gets into a Christian school as having become a Christian.¹⁴⁰

The great success of Christian missions in the Northeast is directly because the government allowed missionaries virtual control of the entire educational system. “Control of the educational system gave them an influence out of all proportion to the small number of missionaries resident in the hills at any given time.”¹⁴¹ The number of Christians is the greatest in those areas where the missionaries had such strong control of education.

There were some disadvantages for accepting government help for schools. The British used a “discreet licensing policy” to limit the areas in which missionaries could take up work. They prohibited the missionaries from entering certain areas such as parts of the Garo Hills, the un-administered areas of Naga Hills, Arunachal Pradesh, the plains of Manipur, and until the 1930s, Tripura. And even in areas where they were permitted to live and work the number of missionaries was strictly controlled.

The second disadvantage is that many people identified Christian missions as part and parcel of the British government agenda and as a result viewed missionaries and their activities with suspicion. Even today a good number of people in the mainland look upon the Christians of North East with suspicion and question their loyalty to the Indian

¹⁴⁰ Downs, *North East India*, 55.

¹⁴¹ Downs, *North East India*, 56.

Republic. Many leaders of BJP, the militant Hindu political party that is antagonistic to the preaching of the gospel, have expressed this suspicion publicly.¹⁴²

Twentieth Century

By the end of 19th century Christianity had gained a foothold in Northeast except for Tripura where missionary work was prohibited till 1930s and Arunachal Pradesh where work did not begin until the post-Independence period.¹⁴³

At the beginning of the 20th century there were a series of revivals in Mizoram, Manipur and in the Khasi and Mizo Hills. Some Welsh Presbyterian missionaries had returned after experiencing the Welsh Revival of 1904 and through their ministries a similar revival where people had ecstatic experiences spread in the Khasi hills in 1905 and as many as 8,000 people were converted during 1905-1906.¹⁴⁴ At the same time a revival broke out in Aizawal in the Mizo hills. Another wave of revival began in 1913 following a serious famine and a third wave started in 1919.¹⁴⁵ These revivals contributed to the significant growth of the Church in Meghalaya, Mizoram, Manipur, and Nagaland. Churches associated with American Baptists grew in membership from 48,000 in 1918 to

¹⁴² The radical Hindu militant organizations such as RSS, Bajrang Dal etc., level this accusation against all minorities. In their view to be a patriotic Indian one must be a Hindu. But most Indian people, irrespective of their religious background, reject such viewpoints.

¹⁴³ Downs, *North East India*, 94.

¹⁴⁴ Downs, *North East India*, 95-96; C.B. Firth gives the figure as 5,000. See 269.

¹⁴⁵ Downs, *North East India*, 96.

250,000 in 1941. By 1951 there were 695,065 Christians in the Northeast representing 7.8% of total Indian Christians.¹⁴⁶

Ministerial training programs developed slowly in the North East due to the high illiteracy among the people. As noted earlier most of the Christian work spread through schools, and churches depended largely on these primary or middle school teachers to disciple the new believers. When the Presbyterians opened their first theological institution in Cherrapunji in 1888 it was a teachers' training school.¹⁴⁷ Only after the Second World War did the Baptists establish a theological institution in the area in Jorhat. Later, the Mizo Presbyterians also started a theological school.¹⁴⁸

A striking feature of the post-war era is the rapid growth of the Roman Catholic Church in Northeast. At the beginning of the Second World War there were about 50,000 Catholics in the region; by 1972 their number had swelled to 260,325.¹⁴⁹ By 1990 there were 713,837 Catholics in the region.¹⁵⁰ This was accomplished primarily through the educational institutions that the Catholics started through the length and breadth of the region. Catholics started institutions of higher learning and schools with excellent standards and facilities using their vast resources. By 1990 there were more than 1,300 Catholic educational institutions with as many as 115,000 students.¹⁵¹ At the same time

¹⁴⁶ Firth, *Indian Church History*, 270.

¹⁴⁷ Firth, *Indian Church History*, 273.

¹⁴⁸ Firth, *Indian Church History*, 273.

¹⁴⁹ Firth, *Indian Church History*, 274.

¹⁵⁰ Downs, *North East India*, 120.

¹⁵¹ Downs, *North East India*, 121.

Protestants were closing down many of their educational institutions due to lack of resources and because government subsidy was withdrawn after independence.

Another important post-independence development is the rapid indigenization of the churches in the Northeast. Independent India's policies resulted in a sharp reduction of the number of foreign missionaries and this in turn resulted in indigenous leaders taking over most of the responsibilities of the ministry. Indigenous structures developed and all these led to the strengthening and growth of the Church. It is reported that in 2010 there are seven thousand Baptist churches associated with the Council of Baptist Churches in Northeast India (CBCNEI). The Council is responsible for eight theological seminaries and numerous small Bible Schools that are serving these churches.¹⁵²

With the strengthening of the indigenous Church, mission outreach of the Northeast Indian Christians, especially those of Nagaland and Mizoram, began. A significant amount of money was raised for missions and a number of missionaries were sent out to the Andaman Islands, Pondicherry, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Orissa, West Bengal, Arunachal Pradesh and a few other states of India.¹⁵³ This trend has continued and Northeast Indian Christians are beginning to play an important role in reaching unreached parts of India.

The Northeast Indian Christians have initiated mission outreach to traditionally hostile tribes. The Ao and Angamis Christians of Nagaland have actively evangelized

¹⁵² A.K. Lama, *Re-envisioning Seminary-Church Relationships*, 5.

¹⁵³ Downs, *North East India*, 126.

some of their traditional enemies often at great personal risk due to the hostilities of the past. In Manipur Naga Christians evangelized their traditional enemies, the Kukis.¹⁵⁴

Conclusion

From this brief survey we can see that Indian Church history is rather unique. Many great men and women from various traditions did their best to reach the unreached with the gospel, plant churches and strengthen the Church in India.

The rich tradition of St. Thomas Christians stand as a testimony of God's faithfulness is preserving His Church in spite of all kinds of odds against the survival of a small minority community in the midst of a dominant Hindu majority. The *Malpanate* system that incorporated the Hindu *Guru-Sishya* relationship in the training of leaders for the St. Thomas Church is a good example to emulate to overcome many of the weaknesses that we witness in theological education/Christian leadership training in our day. The later reformation and revival of the St. Thomas Christians shows the importance of having the Word of God in the heart language of every people. It also points to the importance of theological education in the vernacular.

The sacrificial ministries of missionaries such as Francis Xavier and W. T. Ringeltaube stand as inspiring examples for Indian national missionaries that are rising up by the hundreds in the post-western missionary era of India. We need to learn from their example of suffering, simple life and identifying with the people. Xavier's example of teaching new believers the basics of the gospel by rote memorization is an excellent example to follow as many 'Dalits' who are coming to Christ today are illiterate as were

¹⁵⁴ S. Downs, *North East India*, 133.

the fishermen of the Coromandel Coast. The evidence for the success of Xavier's method is the thriving Christian community of the Coromandel Coast. The success of Ringeltaube and others who followed him, as evidenced by the strong diocese of Church of South India in southern Tamil Nadu shows us that even when the beginning looks rather frail, weak and not very promising, persistence pays off. Training the converts early and entrusting them with leadership paved the way for the Church to be strong.

Robert Nobili's method of identifying as much as possible with the people that are to be reached is another very important lesson that must be emphasized even in the 21st century. For sure it is imperative that we avoid the major error that Nobili made earlier in his career by isolating himself from the so-called low caste people. But his example of adopting the life-style of the people one wants to reach really helps in reaching unreached people as will be illustrated from the story of one NTC graduate later in our study.¹⁵⁵

One of the most important keys of the success of the Church in the North East is the effective use of schools for evangelization and church-planting. This method was successfully used by missionaries earlier in Kerala also. Establishing schools and providing quality education for the poor and needy not only strengthened the Church, it also greatly helped the nation-building process.¹⁵⁶ Many areas of north India are still in dire need for quality schools and the Church needs to learn from this example of North

¹⁵⁵ See Chapter Five for the story of K.P. Philipose and how he has identified with the people that he is reaching; he has baptized over 8,000 people of Arunachal Pradesh in the last few years.

¹⁵⁶ Kerala is 100% literate, the only state in the Union that makes such a claim. This is directly due to the influence of Christianity and the innumerable schools that missionaries started. It is amazing to note that there was no word for school in Malayalam before the arrival of missionaries as education was largely the exclusive privilege of the highest two Hindu castes and was confined to 'Gurukulam' (i.e. Guru's house). People had to coin a word for school and the word coined and still in use for a school is "Pallikkoodam"-building attached to the church!

East and Kerala in using this means to reach people. Our own experience shows that this method still works in reaching the unreached communities.

Thus, this brief look at the Church history in India shows that there are precious insights that we could glean from the past that would help us to find solutions to the problems that we face today in training leaders for the Church and reaching the remaining people groups with the gospel.

CHAPTER THREE:

THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION/CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP TRAINING IN INDIA: A BRIEF HISTORY

Introduction

Before we take up the study of BSS/NTC/CEA it would be helpful to have a bird's eye-view of the history of theological education and Christian leadership development in India. We plan to do this brief survey with the goal of discovering insights that might help us to solve the difficulties that are listed towards the end of Chapter one.

Theological Education Among the Indigenous St. Thomas Christians

As far as we can determine the original form of theological training that existed among the first Christians of India was akin to the 'Gurukulam' system, which was the educational system commonly followed all over India for millennia.¹ The word 'Gurukulam' is comprised of two Sanskrit words: 'guru', which means 'master' or 'teacher', and 'kulam', which means 'home' or 'house'. Thus 'Gurukulam' means 'the house of the guru'. (It is noteworthy that a number of Bible translations in India use the word 'guru' to translate 'Rabbi' in the Greek New Testament). In this system of training the trainee ("sisya") lived with the teacher ("guru") in his house and learned from him

¹George M. Anathil, *Theological Formation of Clergy in India* (Poona: Pontifical Athenaeum, 1966), 7.

not only by listening to him, but also by observing him. Method of training was not focused on class-room; it was by modeling by the guru and observation by the disciples.

This system of training was known as *Malpanate* system among Christians.² Writing in *The Travancore State Manuel* of 1906, one Nagam Aiya has said: "There was among the Syrian Christians a system under which certain priests, called *Malpans*, educated in their houses a few young men whom they prepared for the priesthood. This title may originally have been bestowed for merit."³

Even the stern hands of the ruthless Portuguese Archbishop Menzes,⁴ who succeeded in destroying a lot of the practices and customs of the early Saint Thomas Christians, could not wipe out the *Malpanate* for a long time.

The *Malpanate* system, being the original form of training among the Syrian Christians in Malabar, was deeply rooted in the consciousness of the community. It has also a close affinity to the *Guru* system of the surrounding Hindu majority. Therefore, even after ecclesiastical legislation had prescribed the seminary as the only legitimate form of theological training, the *Malpanate* system did not disappear. For two and a half centuries after the synod of Diamper such *Malpanates* continued to appear and disappear all over Malabar.⁵

It was customary for every family to dedicate at least one son in a generation for the priesthood. The whole Christian community was involved in the training process. Only if the whole community together presented the candidate would he be ordained to the ministry. For this, all the parishioners came together and presented a letter known as *Desakuri* (literal meaning, a letter from the whole community) to the bishop.

² Anathil, *Theological Formation*, 1-30.

³ Anathil, *Theological Formation*, 29.

⁴ W. J. Richards, *The Indian Christians of St. Thomas: Otherwise called the Syrian Christians of Malabar: A sketch of their History, and an Account of their Present Condition, as well as a Discussion of the Legend of St. Thomas* (London: Bemrose & Sons Limited, 1908), 15. See also K.M. George, *Christianity in India*, 109.

⁵ Anathil, *Theological Formation*, 29.

Thus, from the scant evidence we have about theological education among the first Christians in India we can tell at least two things: a) senior pastors took young candidates under their wings and personally trained them by showing them how ministry is done, often the trainees living with the senior pastors twenty four seven (following the example of the Lord Jesus Christ training his disciples); and b) the whole community was actively involved in the process in that many families provided candidates for ministry and actively monitored their progress as witnessed by the presentation of the *Desakuri* mentioned above.

Protestant Theological Education in India

First Protestant Theological Training Center in India

The arrival of the first Protestant missionaries in India, Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg and Heinrich Plütschau, who reached Tranquebar (in Tamil, *Tarangkampadi*, “village of dancing waves” on the Coromandel Coast, approximately 250 kilometers south of Chennai on July 9, 1706, marked the beginning of a new epoch in the history of Christianity in India.⁶ They were sent by King Frederick IV of Denmark. The King’s court preacher, Franz Julius Lütken had recruited the two young German missionaries who were students at the Pietist center in Halle.⁷ Though sent by the King with a personal

⁶ Neill, *A History of Christianity in India: 1707-1858* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 28.

⁷ Kenneth Scott Latourette, *Three Centuries of Advance- 1550 AD to 1800 AD*, vol. 3 of *A History of the Expansion of Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), 278.

letter from him, the two were not accorded a warm welcome by the local Danish authorities. It took them three days to get a boat to take them ashore from the ship.⁸

In spite of all the trials and difficulties they had to overcome, including a four month solitary imprisonment for Ziegenbalg in November 1708 at the hands of Hassius, the commandant⁹ - the “Tranquebar missionaries”, as they came to be known, laid the foundation for Protestant theological education in India. They had to begin by starting elementary schools for children, which they did from the very beginning, as literacy was very uncommon.¹⁰ By 1725, five hundred children were studying in twenty-one mission schools.¹¹

Though the first Indian, Aaron (1698-1745), was ordained for the ministry only on December 28, 1733,¹² over twenty-seven years after their arrival (and fourteen years after the death of Ziegenbalg in 1719 at the age of thirty-six), from the beginning the new missionaries recognized the importance of training nationals as catechists in spite of the fact that they had very little confidence in their ability to lead non-Christians to Christ which was the “primary work of the mission”.¹³ As early as 1709 Ziegenbalg was writing back to Europe about the necessity of a missionary seminary in the East with the idea that

⁸ E. R. Hambye, *Eighteenth Century*, vol. III of *History of Christianity in India* (Bangalore: The Church History Association of India, 1977), 118-119. See also C.B. Firth, *Indian Church History*, 132.

⁹ Firth, *Indian Church History*, 133; Stephen Neill, *Christianity in India: 1707-1858*, 33.

¹⁰ Hambye, *Eighteenth Century*, 119.

¹¹ Hambye, *Eighteenth Century*, 120.

¹² Daniel Jeyaraj, *Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg: the Father of Modern Protestant Mission: An Indian Assessment* (New Delhi: The Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2006), 182.

¹³ Neill, *Christianity in India: 1707-1858*, 36. See footnote # 34 on page 478 of Neill for an interesting list of the kind of people who were trained by these early missionaries. See also Daniel Jeyaraj, *Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg*, 177 and E. R. Hambye, *Eighteenth Century*, 120.

Europeans who were coming to the East as missionaries need to be trained in the East.¹⁴ He was aware of the theological training institute which was most probably founded by the Dutch Chaplain Philipp Baldaeus in Jaffna, Sri Lanka sometime in the 1660's.¹⁵ Three years after their arrival in Tranquebar, on September 27, 1709, Ziegenbalg wrote a letter to Halle informing the leaders of the need for a seminary to train both European and Tamil students.¹⁶

He did not look favorably upon European missionaries trained in Europe coming to the mission field. The training they received in Europe was deficient in many ways. They needed longer time to become familiar with Indian people, their customs and culture and to learn their languages. As persons highly influenced by Pietism, Ziegenbalg and his colleague, Grüdler, who arrived in 1709, were not sure whether the European trained candidates accepted the authority and centrality of the Word of God for faith and life. Ziegenbalg had serious doubts about the way Danish theologians interpreted the Bible utilizing Enlightenment perspectives and their use of Aristotelian categories. So, he preferred to train the candidates himself.¹⁷

Even as late as January, 1714 Tranquebar missionaries had not received any reply from Halle.¹⁸ But they did not give up. They kept writing and campaigning for a

¹⁴ Neill, *Christianity in India: 1707-1858*, 35.

¹⁵ Jeyaraj, *Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg*, 177.

¹⁶ Jeyaraj, *Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg*, 177.

¹⁷ Jeyaraj, *Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg*, 179.

¹⁸ Jeyaraj, *Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg*, 179.

‘*Seminario Studisorum*’.¹⁹ In a letter dated September 27, 1714, they sought the help of SPCK to establish a seminary. In that letter they wrote:

Our Thoughts concerning a SEMINARY for Missionaries, to be made up of Students sent from Europe, and of Indians educated in our Schools, are every Day growing to a greater Maturity. We hope that such young Men, after they have been duly prepared in the Knowledge of Languages, and fitted for the Design, the Churches of Christ planted in the East-Indies may reap from thence a considerable Benefit for their daily Increase.²⁰

During his visit to Halle in 1715 Ziegenbalg tried to recruit candidates to come to Tranquebar; but he could not persuade a single one. While the senior missionary was gone to Halle and Copenhagen, Grüdler carefully planned to establish a *Collegium Biblicum et Theologicum*. On August 31, 1716 Grüdler wrote to Francke about the urgent need to establish a seminary to train the Tamil Lutherans in the Word of God.²¹

Finally, on October 23, 1716 Ziegenbalg and Grüdler selected eight senior students from the Tamil school for boys and launched the first Protestant seminary in India.²² Thus Protestant theological education was born in India almost two hundred years after Martin Luther nailed the ninety five theses on the door of the castle church at Wittenberg on October 31, 1517-one year and eight days short of the 200th anniversary!

The goals of the seminary and methods of teaching used were as follows:

1. Every student must become thoroughly familiar with the content of the Bible. So, following the example of *Francke Foundations* in Halle, every student was required to read through the Bible within a specific time period.
2. The main teachings of various Biblical passages must be memorized.
3. Careful study of Systematic Theology.

¹⁹ Jeyaraj, *Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg*, 179.

²⁰ Jeyaraj, *Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg*, 180.

²¹ Jeyaraj, *Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg*, 181.

²² Jeyaraj, *Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg*, 181. Also Neill, *Christianity in India: 1707-1858*, 31.

4. Students must teach smaller children catechism. They should listen to sermons preached in the church, write them down, memorize them and recite them in catechism classes and schools.
5. They should write detailed exegesis of chosen texts, and recite that from memory.
6. History of the biblical books must be studied.
7. The pedagogical and exegetical skills of the missionaries should be observed and learned and incorporated into their own teaching and preaching.
8. They must learn the Portuguese language.
9. Geography must be learned and also how to use the globes supplied by SPCK.
10. Public speaking must be practiced.
11. Learn mathematics.²³

Stephen Neill has summarized Ziegenbalg's philosophy of ministry in five points.

It is worth noting these.

1. "Church and school are to go together. Christians must be able to read the Word of God, and therefore all Christian children must be educated."
2. "If Christians are to read the Word of God, that word must be available to them in their own language."
3. "The preaching of the Gospel must be based on an accurate knowledge of the mind of the people."
4. "The aim (of Missions) must be definite and personal conversion."
5. "At as early a date as possible an Indian Church, with its own Indian ministry must come into being."²⁴

The influence of Pietism and especially of Francke upon Ziegenbalg and his colleagues is very obvious. Their vision of the ministry (and theological education) was motivated by a very strong love for the Lord, His Church and the Bible. The example of the first Protestant theological seminary in India needs to inspire us to recapture this love which was, unfortunately, lost to a great extent in course of time.

From the insights that Ziegenbalg and his colleagues had we can see that they were way ahead of their times in their views about theological education in the context of

²³ Jeyaraj, *Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg*, 181-182.

²⁴ Neill, *Christian Missions*, 194-197.

a mission field. Though they might not have used phrases and words such as “cross-cultural communication,” “cultural adaptation,” “indigenization,” and the like, they understood that simply importing Western style theological education was inappropriate for a context like that of India. They also understood that Indian leadership was essential for the development of a strong indigenous church. Ziegenbalg had the foresight to understand that it would take a long time to develop such indigenous leadership and the sooner they began the better it would be. The tone of urgency can clearly be heard in their letters.

Serampore-A Giant Step Forward

If the arrival of Ziegenbalg and Plütschau in the South Indian seaport of Tranquebar marked the beginning of a new era in missions in India, arrival of William Carey in the North Indian seaport of Calcutta and, at that time, the seat of British power in India, eighty-seven years and five months later, on November 11, 1793, may be described as the event through which missions in India took a giant step forward.

Hostility of the East India Company and the Key Role of the Danish Government

It is really curious that the two uniquely important centers of Protestant missions and theological training in India developed in two relatively unimportant Danish settlements- Tranquebar in the South and Serampore in the North. In the providence of God He used the Danish King Frederick IV to send the first Protestant missionaries to

India and it was only because these missionaries were under his patronage that they were allowed to remain and work in India.²⁵

Almost a century later, it was the Danish patronage that allowed the establishment of the Serampore center in the face of stiff opposition from the British East India Company. Serampore was part of the Danish colony and therefore under the authority of the Danish king, unlike Calcutta which was under the rule of the British East India Company. If the tiny sliver of land north of Calcutta were not controlled by the Danish we might never have heard of the Serampore Trio and the story of Protestant theological education in India might have been very different. When Carey and colleagues decided to establish the college it was the Danish Governor's associate, Major Wickedie, who planned the building which came to be known as "the finest edifice of its kind in Asia."²⁶ The iron-wrought gates and the elegant staircases on both sides of the spacious entrance hall were gifted by the Royal House of Denmark. Finally, it was the Danish King Frederick VI who in 1827 gave Serampore College the charter which gave the college the authority to issue degrees. Even though the Danes never ruled India their contribution to the evangelization of India stands as second to none.

Like Ziegenbalg, Carey too met with a hostile administration and all kinds of impediments that would have disheartened most people with less mettle. But unlike Ziegenbalg, Carey and his colleagues in Serampore got a warm welcome from the Danish

²⁵ Carey included a brief narration of Ziegenbalg's work as well as the contributions of Dutch East India Company in the evangelization of places like Ceylon (today's Sri Lanka), Formosa (Thailand) etc. in his classic that he wrote to motivate Christians to obey the Great Commission. See William Carey, *An Enquiry into the Obligation of Christians to use means for the Conversion of the Heathens: New Facsimile edition with an introduction by Ernest A. Payne* (London: The Carey Kingsgate Press Limited, 1961), 36-37.

²⁶Mrs. E. L. Wenger, "The Serampore Mission and its Founders," in *The Story of Serampore and its College* (Serampore: The Council of Serampore College, 2005), 17.

authorities; it was the British that gave Carey troubles. But Carey was a called man with an iron will; nothing would deter him from fulfilling His Master's call upon him.²⁷

Within a short time of his arrival in India he faced such serious issues as his son Peter's death, his wife's mental illness, the home-front forgetting him and sending no financial support, and his friend, the erratic Dr. John Thomas²⁸, squandering the little funds they had.²⁹

Because of the hostility of the East India Company that virtually ruled Bengal Carey could not settle in Calcutta.³⁰ For the first two months of their lives in India the Careys had to move so many times from place to place. Then, through the help of his "Munshi" (tutor, a man by the name of Ram Basu³¹, the one who was helping Carey to learn languages), he acquired some land in a place called Dehatta with the plan that he would farm to earn a living! He actually obtained a plot of land and had started

²⁷ Long before he landed on the shores of India he had expressed his conviction that a Christian minister is under obligation to go where God wants him to go and suffer whatever God sends his way. "He virtually bids farewell to friends, pleasures, and comforts, and stands in readiness to endure the greatest sufferings in the work of his Lord, and Master. . . . The flights, and hatred of men, and even pretended friends, gloomy prisons, and tortures, the society of barbarians of uncouth speech, miserable accommodations in wretched wildernesses, hunger, and thirst, nakedness, weariness, and painfulness, hard work, and but little worldly encouragement, should rather be the objects of their expectation." *Enquiry*, 72; no wonder that nothing could turn him back!

²⁸ It was John Thomas who persuaded Carey and his Baptist brethren to choose India as their first mission field. They were initially thinking of Tahiti. See A. Christopher Smith, *The Serampore Mission Enterprise* (Bangalore: Centre for Contemporary Christianity, 2006), 297.

²⁹ Latourette, *Three Centuries of Advance*, 104. See also C.B. Firth, *Indian Church History*, 147-148 and Sunil Kumar Chatterjee, *William Carey and Serampore* (Calcutta: Ghosh Publishing Concern, 1984), iii-xx.

³⁰ Wenger, "The Serampore Mission", 2.

³¹ Neill, *Christianity in India: 1707-1858*, 189.

cultivating it when, through Dr. John Thomas' acquaintance with one George Udney, he got a job to manage an indigo factory.³²

Finally, after seven months of arrival in India, in June 1794, he had a place to settle down. Carey and family lived in Madnabati for five and a half years. While working full-time in the indigo factory he learned Bengali and Sanskrit, preached to people in the surrounding areas and opened a school. He also translated the New Testament and portions of the Old Testament into Bengali.³³ With the help of Mr. Udney he acquired a printing press and was ready to print portions of the New Testament in Bengali, but could not print as he did not have a printer to help him.³⁴

In these first years of Carey's ministry, when he was working alone, we can already see his philosophy of ministry and of theological education developing, which blossomed later in Serampore. He knew that before he can teach Christian theology, the Word of God had to be available in the language of the people. He also knew that people needed to be able to read the Word of God; otherwise it would be useless to translate it. So, even when he himself was struggling for survival, he started a school to teach poor children to read and write.³⁵

Towards the end of 1799 four new families, including those of Marshman and Ward arrived by an American ship. They were denied permission to land in the British East India Company territory. They were forced to take refuge in the Danish territory and were warmly welcomed in Serampore by the Danish Governor, Colonel Bie on October

³² Latourette, *Three Centuries of Advance*, 105.

³³ Latourette, *Three Centuries of Advance*, 105.

³⁴ Sunil Kumar Chatterjee, *William Carey and Serampore*, iv; Firth, *Indian Church History*, 148.

³⁵ Firth, *Indian Church History*, 148.

14, 1799.³⁶ He also protected them from the harassment of the British East India Company officials who were determined to deport them back to England.

Carey Forced to Choose Serampore

Carey tried to get the newly arrived missionaries permission to join him. But the East India Company would not allow them to be in British territory. So Carey had no choice but sacrifice all the work he had done thus far in Madnabati- the property, school, and church- and move to Serampore. He wrote:

Serampore we may settle as missionaries, which is not allowed here, and the great ends of the mission, particularly the printing of the scriptures, seem much more likely to be answered in that situation than in this. There also Brother Ward can have the inspection of the press: whereas here we should be deprived of his important assistance. In that part of the country the inhabitants are far more numerous than in this; and other missionaries may there be permitted to join us, which here seems they will not.³⁷

Thus Carey decided to move to Serampore. He joined Marshman, Ward and others on January 10, 1800 marking the beginning of the famous Serampore mission.³⁸

None but God could foresee the implications of that day in the first month of a new century, not even Carey. Though two centuries and a decade have passed since then, Protestant theological education in India continues to be greatly influenced by what that uneducated, cobbler, Baptist-preacher and his friends did in Serampore. To this day Serampore College is the only Protestant accrediting agency for theological schools in India that is recognized by all the 'main-line' denominations, Pentecostals and other

³⁶ Neill, *Christianity in India: 1707-1858*, 190; Mrs. E. L. Wenger, 2.

³⁷ Quoted in Wenger, "The Serampore Mission", 2-3.

³⁸ Chatterjee, *William Carey and Serampore*, iv; Firth, *Indian Church History*, 148.

emerging groups. It is also recognized by the Syrian (St. Thomas) Orthodox, Jacobite and Mar Thoma churches.

An overwhelmingly large majority of theological students in India still seek a ‘Serampore degree’ as the degree granted by the Senate of Serampore under the charter issued by the Danish King in 1827 and later renewed by the 1918 Act of Bengal Legislative Council (British) is the only University degree available for Christian theological students in the subcontinent.³⁹

In 1925 George Howells, who is sometimes described as the “second founder of Serampore College,” sent by BMS in 1895 to India and became the Principal of the college in 1906, wrote about the college that it was: “. . . far more widely appreciated and acknowledged as educational Christian missionary and ecumenical college rooted in the noble vision of the founders expecting and attempting great things.”⁴⁰

Prime Purpose of Serampore College

The major concern with which Carey, Ward, and Marshman entered the enterprise of founding a college was the proclamation of the Gospel and the strengthening of the Church in the Orient through training indigenous laborers for the Lord’s vineyard. It was clearly stipulated that for one to serve in the Council of the College one must have faith

³⁹ Ravi Tiwari, *Senate of Serampore College (University) at Ninety: Issues and Concerns* (Serampore: Senate of Serampore College, no date), 3. Though the charter was given by King Frederick VI of Denmark in 1827 authorizing the issue of degrees, the first Bachelor of Divinity was granted only in 1915; hence the phrase ‘at Ninety’ in Dr. Tiwari’s booklet. Dr. Ravi Tiwari is the current Registrar of the Senate of Serampore College. South Asia Institute of Advanced Christian Studies (SAIACS), Bangalore, is now offering degrees accredited by secular Indian universities; but it is still very limited in scope.

⁴⁰ Quoted by J. J. Harris, *Evangelicals are true Ecumenicals*, 30 from George Howells, *The Story of Serampore and its College* (Serampore: College Council, 1927). George Harris served the College for thirty-five years and is credited with rejuvenating a dying institution.

in the divinity of Christ and His atoning death. Anyone who does not hold on to the fundamental doctrines of Christianity was disqualified to serve in any responsible position.⁴¹

Enquiry-Carey's (and Serampore's) Manifesto

The primary passion of the Serampore Trio was preaching Christ to the people of India and beyond. Their philosophy of ministry was to utilize all possible means to accomplish this goal. Carey had already, while he was a Baptist pastor in England, made known to all his conviction that Christians are obligated to obey the Great Commission and use all available means “for the conversion of heathens.”⁴² The guiding principles of his life and ministry can be found in his famous *Enquiry*.

He built his argument on the cornerstone of the Lord's Prayer, which most Christians knew and prayed daily.⁴³ From there he proceeded to argue that the Lord Himself “sent forth his disciples to preach the good tidings to every creature, and to endeavour *by all possible methods* to bring over a lost world to God.”⁴⁴ As best as he could he endeavored to give theological answers to those who thought that the Great Commission applied only to the apostles.

As is well known, even among his Baptist brothers he had encountered opposition to his ideas. “Sit down, young man; when God wants to convert the heathen, He would

⁴¹ Harris, *Evangelicals are True Ecumenicals!*, 79.

⁴² Carey, *Enquiry*. Phrase is found in the full title of *Enquiry*.

⁴³ Carey, *Enquiry*, 3.

⁴⁴ Carey, *Enquiry*, 5. Emphasis added.

do it without your help or mine,” were the words he heard from the mouth of John Collett Ryland, a senior fellow-Baptist in September 1785 when Carey raised the issue in a ministers’ meeting. The rigid eighteenth century Calvinism of the Baptists had no room for missionary endeavor.⁴⁵ Yet Carey’s conviction that the Gospel and God’s love is for every human being compelled him to write what in 1885 George Smith would describe as “the first and still the greatest missionary treatise in the English language.”⁴⁶

Carey concluded *Enquiry* by pleading for the formation of a sodality to mobilize Christians into action.⁴⁷ He was wise enough to recognize that without having a body that was solely focused on the specific task of fulfilling the Great Commission the church would soon fall back into inaction. So he insisted that the newly formed sodality needed to be well organized and needed to “make a number of rules respecting the regulations of the plan, and the persons who are to be employed as missionaries, the means of defraying the expence (sic), etc., etc.”⁴⁸ Specific functions of the sodality were detailed in the *Enquiry* which are helpful in 21st century as it was in the 18th. Carey even wrote suggestions how to raise funds.⁴⁹

Though Carey’s wish was to recruit all the Christians for this urgent task, he was a realist and knew that getting all the denominations together might be impossible. So he

⁴⁵ Carey, *Enquiry*, iii.

⁴⁶ Carey, *Enquiry*, xii.

⁴⁷ Carey, *Enquiry*, 82.

⁴⁸ Carey, *Enquiry*, 82.

⁴⁹ Tithing is urged by all Christians. If people did not heed that counsel Carey thought that money saved from abstaining from the use of sugar produced by the labor of slaves in West Indies “would abundantly suffice.” Carey, *Enquiry*, 85-86.

was ready to settle with a sodality among the “particular baptist denomination.”⁵⁰ But he was not at all happy to leave other denominations unaffected. His ecumenical spirit, which became very evident in the Serampore years, can clearly be seen in his words in

Enquiry:

I wish with all my heart, that every one who loves our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, would in some way or other engage in it. But in the present divided state of Christendom, it would be more likely for good to be done by each denomination engaging separately in the work, than if they were to embark in it conjointly. There is room enough for us all, without interfering with each other; and if no unfriendly interference took place, each denomination would bear good will to the other, and with, and pray for its success, considering it as upon the whole friendly to the great cause of true religion; but if all were intermingled, it is likely their private discords might throw a damp upon their spirits, and much retard their public usefulness.⁵¹

Birth of the First Protestant Sodality

The birth of the first Protestant sodality, ‘The Particular (Calvinistic) Baptist Society for Propagating the Gospel among the Heathens’ on October 2, 1792 (which later became Baptist Missionary Society),⁵² was the immediate result of *Enquiry* and the untiring spirit of William Carey. His influence was not limited to BMS. As history has shown this “Protestant archetype” became *the* model for Missions and it was only the first Protestant sodality.⁵³

⁵⁰ Carey, *Enquiry*, 84.

⁵¹ Carey, *Enquiry*, 84.

⁵² Wenger, “The Serampore Mission”, 1.

⁵³ Thus ending “The Great Gap: 1517-1993”; see Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions*, 450.

Soon followed the London Missionary Society (LMS) in 1795, the Scottish Missionary Society in 1796, the Netherlands Missionary Society in 1797, the Church Missionary Society in 1799, the British and Foreign Missionary Society in 1804, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions in 1810, the American Baptist Foreign Missions Society in 1814, the Basel Mission in 1816, the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society in 1817-1818, the Danish Missionary Society in 1821, the Berlin Missionary Society in 1824, the Rhenish Missionary Society in 1828, the Swedish Missionary Society in 1835, and the North German Missionary Society in 1836.⁵⁴

Thus Carey was, even in the eyes of his most fierce critics, instrumental in beginning what Andrew Walls has called the “fortunate subversion” of the traditional structures which resulted in amazing developments in Protestant Missions nearly three hundred years after the Reformation.⁵⁵

All that he and others in Serampore accomplished are the fulfillment of Carey’s prophetic vision delineated in *Enquiry*. Translation of the Bible into as many languages as possible was a top priority as they firmly believed in the authority and efficacy of the Scripture. Printing and distribution of the translated Scripture had to be equally important. This conviction led to the establishment of the then largest printing and publishing enterprises in Asia on the banks of the Hooghly, what C.B. Firth has called “a translation industry.”⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Publications, 2005), 212

⁵⁵ Andrew Walls, “Missionary Societies and the Fortunate Subversion of the Church,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 88, no. 2 (1988): 141-155.

⁵⁶ Firth, *Indian Church History*, 151.

God had amazingly elevated the cobbler/preacher with no University education or degree to be the Professor of Bengali, Sanskrit, and Marathi in the British East India Company's Fort Williams College. Because the college served all three British Presidencies there were language teachers ("Pundits") from practically all over India as Carey's colleagues, as many as fifty, twelve serving in Carey's department alone.⁵⁷ This excited Carey as he saw this as God's providential hand to assist him in the propagation of the Word of God.

With excitement Carey wrote near the end of 1803:

We have it in our power, if our means would do for it, in the space of fifteen years to have the Word of God translated and printed in all the languages of the East. Our situation is such as to furnish us with the best assistance from Natives of the different countries. We can have types of all the different characters cast here; and about seven hundred rupees, part of which I hope to furnish, would complete the work.⁵⁸

This was no idle dream. In eight years, in 1811, Ward wrote to a cousin a description of what was happening in the translation nerve center in Serampore:

As you enter, you see your cousin, in a small room, dressed in a white jacket, reading or writing, and looking over the office, which is more than 170 feet long. There you find Indians translating the Scriptures into the different tongues, or correcting proof-sheets. You observe, laid out in cases, types in Arabic, Persian, Nagari, Telugu, Panjabi, Marathi, Chinese, Oriya, Burmese, Kanarese, Greek, Hebrew, and English. Hindus, Mussulmans and Christian Indians are busy composing, correcting, distributing. Next are found men throwing off the Scripture sheets in the different languages; others folding the sheets and delivering them to the large sore-room; and six Mussulmans do the binding. Beyond the office are the varied type-casters, besides a group of men making ink; and in a spacious open walled-round place, our paper-mill, for we manufacture our own paper.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Firth, *Indian Church History*, 150.

⁵⁸ Firth, *Indian Church History*, 150.

⁵⁹ Firth, *Indian Church History*, 151.

It is nothing short of amazing that these missionaries with very little resources at their disposal and with little support from back home could accomplish all that they did. By the time Carey died in 1834 the whole Bible was published in six different languages, New Testament in twenty-three languages and portions in ten other languages. Publications included languages such as Burmese, Javan, Malayan and Chinese.

Training “Christian Natives”

Carey was not satisfied with just translating and publishing the Holy Bible. That was only one of the means he wanted to employ as part of the multi-pronged approach he took to make Gospel available to as many as possible in India and beyond. Another very important ‘means’ was the training of “Christian natives.” In one of Carey’s early letters to John Ryland, who was an ardent supporter of Carey, though he was the son and successor of the man who asked him to sit down in the September 1785 meeting of the Baptists in England, Carey wrote: “I conceive that the work of preparing a large body as possible of Christian natives of India for the work of Christian Pastors and Itinerants is of immense importance. English missionaries will never be able to instruct the whole of India.”⁶⁰

The vision of training large numbers of Indian Christians in the ministry was a top priority for the Serampore Trio. An argument put forth by Marshman in favor of training indigenous workers based on the economics of mission sounds almost like the argument popularized in the West in the 20th century by Bob Finley of Christian Aid and K.P.

⁶⁰ D.A. Christadoss, “The Story of Serampore College, 1818-1929,” in *The Story of Serampore and its College* (Serampore: The Council of Serampore College, 2005), 20.

Yohannan of Gospel for Asia.⁶¹ Marshman wrote: “The sum required for the support of a European family would be sufficient to meet the wants of twenty native labourers, who, under his guidance, might itinerate through a large district and fill it with Scripture knowledge.”⁶²

As noted earlier, even while he was struggling for the physical survival of his own family, while he still lived in the British territory of Madnabati, he found time and resources to open a school to teach the local children reading and writing. Carey knew that in the long run the only way that the Church in India would become strong was only if national workers were trained in large numbers and he had to start with the most basic level of training.

He had to begin by teaching Hindu and Muslim children as there were no Christians to teach. His hope was that the ministry of schools would provide him not only a platform for serving the people to improve their lot in life, but eventually that would lead to conversion of both Hindus and Muslims. This conviction motivated the Serampore Trio to open schools wherever they could. By 1818 they had already opened 126 schools for boys with over 10,000 students.⁶³ By 1826 there were twelve schools for girls in which three hundred girls received elementary education.⁶⁴

⁶¹ The importance of training indigenous believers is by no means a new concept invented by the Serampore Trio. Ziegenbalg and Plütschau had insisted on this principle almost a century earlier. Many Roman Catholic missionaries also were pioneers in training national clergy. See Chapter II for a glimpse of the theological debate within the Roman Catholic missions regarding the ordination of indigenous clergy. Francis Ingoli, the first secretary of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith fiercely argued for the ordination of indigenous clergy and bishops and won the debate.

⁶² Christados, *The Story of Serampore*, 20.

⁶³ Henry Huizinga, *Missionary Education in India* (University of Michigan PhD thesis: Published by Author, n.d.), 11. See also Sunil Kumar Chatterjee, *William Carey and Serampore*, x; C.B. Firth, *Indian Church History*, 153.

⁶⁴ Huizinga, *Missionary Education*, 11.

Later, when they opened the college, this conviction led them to include teachers' training as an important part of the academics in Serampore College. In 1805 the Serampore Trio had again affirmed that providing training for nationals⁶⁵ had to be one of their top priorities:

Another part of our work is the forming of our native brethren to usefulness, fostering every kind of genius, and cherishing every gift and grace in them; in this respect we can scarcely be too lavish of our attention to their improvement. It is only by means of native preachers we can hope for the universal spread of the Gospel through this immense continent.⁶⁶

Some researchers like Joe Coker have argued for an evolutionary understanding of the importance of education as a "means" in the minds of Carey and friends.⁶⁷ It is certainly true that as they spent more time in India the enormity of the task of evangelizing the subcontinent became clearer in their mind. And, as any wise laborer would do, Carey must have fine-tuned his approach to the task.

As "teaching" is part of the Great Commission⁶⁸ itself, asserting that education as a "means" is a new idea that Carey developed in India is a debatable proposition.⁶⁹ This is especially so as one of the first things he did while he lived in the British East India Company territory of Madnabati is start a school. Therefore, it is more reasonable to believe that Carey did understand "teaching" as an integral part of the Great Commission. And as he spent more time in India and better understood the ground realities, the

⁶⁵ It is very interesting to note that they called training nationals "forming of our native brethren to usefulness."

⁶⁶ Neill, *Christian Missions*, 225.

⁶⁷ Joe L. Coker, "Developing a Theory of Missions in Serampore: The Increased Emphasis upon Education as a "Means for the Conversion of the Heathens," *Mission Studies* 18 no.1 (2001): 42-60.

⁶⁸ Carey never used the phrase "Great Commission"; the phrase appears only towards the end of 19th century.

⁶⁹ This seems to be Joe L. Coker's thesis.

conviction of the importance of using education as a means of spreading the Gospel and training indigenous believers as laborers of the Gospel grew and became strong.

Because of this conviction their plans to start a college went forward in spite of the unfortunate break in relationship with the Missionary Society in 1816. The goal of the college was to provide “a higher and more complete education. . . . to the natives, more especially of Christian parentage, and in which native preachers and schoolmasters, whose defects had long been felt, should be efficiently trained up.”⁷⁰

A prospectus was issued on July 15th, 1818. It stated that the institution was to be a college “for the instruction of Asiatic Christian and other youth in Eastern Literature and European Science.”⁷¹ At the same time the college was to be considered “*pre-eminently a divinity school, where Christian youth of personal piety and aptitude for the work of an evangelist should go through a complete course of instruction in Christian theology.*”⁷² Carey and friends wanted to accomplish this dual goal from the beginning: train Christians in ministry and at the same time help young people of all different faiths in their education. The Trio insisted that the College should be open to all without distinction of caste and creed. With this dual goal Serampore College opened its doors with thirty-seven students, nineteen Christians and eighteen non-Christians on August 15, 1818.⁷³

Stephen Neill also summarized Carey’s work, as he did that of Ziegenbalg, in five points, remarkably similar to that of the German Lutheran’s. Neill wrote:

⁷⁰ Christadoss, *The Story of Serampore*, 21.

⁷¹ Christadoss, *The Story of Serampore*, 21.

⁷² Christadoss, *The Story of Serampore*, 21. Emphasis added.

⁷³ Neill, *Christian Missions*, 225; August 15 is India’s Independence Day that came 129 years later.

Carey was extraordinarily independent and modern in his outlook. He saw missionary work as a five-pronged advance, with equal attention directed to each of the five elements: 1) the widespread preaching of the Gospel by every possible method; 2) the support of the preaching by the distribution of the Bible in the languages of the country; 3) the establishment at the earliest possible moment of a Church; 4) a profound study of the background and thought of the non-Christian people; 5) the training at the earliest possible moment of an indigenous ministry.⁷⁴

In his *A History of Christianity in India: 1707-1858*, Neill has given a slightly different and more detailed summary of the ministry of the Serampore Trio which is very helpful under the title “Principles of Missionary Action”.⁷⁵

Carey’s broad minded, ecumenical approach (to the extent of including non-Christian students in a “pre-eminently” divinity school) elicited a lot of criticism from fellow Baptists and other Christians who could not understand his perspective. In a letter dated September 23, 1834, to a fellow missionary, John Wilson of Bombay, Marshman felt compelled to defend the Serampore Trio’s decision to include even non-Christian students in a “divinity” school:

The assertion of the founders of the college is fully justified, that their object in planning it was ‘The enlightenment of India and the propagation and final establishment of the gospel therein’. . . . But as to the religious character of the institution, if there be any alteration, it is that it has become even more decided. . . . The heathen students are all under my own care in the English department, and are classed with their Christian countrymen without any distinction but what may arise from their various degrees of proficiency in all their studies not purely theological. All of them sufficiently advanced read and study the Scriptures two days in the week; and all their other studies, whether in science or history, are conducted after a Christian manner. At morning worship, indeed, the Christian students alone are required to attend, and nothing either in profession or practice is required of any heathen which is inconsistent with his own faith; but the whole controversy between Christianity and idolatry and the whole contrast between religion and irreligion are before them continually; and we leave the result to God. What more can be necessary to make a religious institution?⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Neill, *Christian Missions*, 224.

⁷⁵ Neill, *Christianity in India: 1707-1858*, 191-201.

⁷⁶ Huizinga, *Missionary Education*, 12.

It is obvious that the hope of the Serampore Trio was that with such “continual” exposure to the Truth these “heathen” students would come to the knowledge of the Gospel. From history we now know that only very few did come to such knowledge. Was Carey disappointed? He was such an optimist and believed in his call so firmly he has not left us any evidence, if he was.

The early history of Serampore College was full of difficulties and problems. Construction of the beautiful main building, one of the most illustrious buildings of its kind in all of India, at a cost of Rs. 150,000 drained all their financial resources. Finance was and an ongoing struggle from then on, made more difficult by bank failures and other events beyond their control. (As founder of a ministry, though so small and insignificant in comparison, I can well identify with these brothers and their struggles!)

But the foundation they laid is still standing. There were times in between, when the ministry was in the hands of lesser men, that it looked like it would fail.⁷⁷ But God of Carey did not allow that to happen.

Vernacularists vs. Anglicists: Why One of Carey’s Key Visions Failed

In the first half of 1800’s a battle was brewing in British India. What was the best strategy to be followed in India? A group of people sometimes called Orientalists argued that India’s past (its great literature and art) needed to be studied and, if possible, resurrected. Whereas, another group known as Anglicists, argued for aggressive teaching of English and Western science as the best method to follow. Though Carey should not

⁷⁷ Neill, *Christian Missions*, 225.

be called strictly an Orientalist⁷⁸, he believed that the best way to reach the people of India with the Gospel was through their own language and culture.

Because of this conviction Carey decided to make Bengali the medium of instruction in the College.⁷⁹ He understood the importance of vernacular as the heart language of people. This is demonstrated not only by his extensive translation work, but also by his insistence that education must be in vernacular, which included theological education.

Lamin Sanneh points out Carey as a person who recognized that vernacular was sufficient for conveying the message of the Gospel and one who honored the vernacular and the local culture that lay behind it through his emphasis on translation.⁸⁰

Carey's view was that English, while it should be taught to open the windows to the Western culture, should not become the predominant language. He desired that every Indian student must become so fluent in Indian culture so that he might become an effective missionary to his own people.⁸¹ "Christian Indians should be able to debate with the learned men of Benares on terms of equality."⁸² The first two clauses of the first

⁷⁸ 'Vernacularist' is a better description of Carey. J.C. Ingleby, quoting David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance: the Dynamics of Indian Modernisation, 1773-1835* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1979), 251, wrote: "While the Vernacularists were not necessarily 'on the side of Hindu culture', they were not on the side of the Anglicists either. David Kopf describes them as 'popular culture Orientalists. He felt that William Carey would have probably been the leader of the attack on Macaulayism had he not died (in 1834) just before the Orientalist versus Anglicist controversy came to a head." See *Missionaries, Education and India* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2000), 70.

⁷⁹ J. C. Ingleby, *Missionaries, Education and India*, 67-68, 82; Firth, *Indian Church History*, 153.

⁸⁰ Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1989), 101-105.

⁸¹ Ingleby, *Missionaries, Education and India*, 83.

⁸² Ingleby, *Missionaries, Education and India*, 67.

College Prospectus published in 1818 makes this philosophy of theological training crystal clear:

- a) The College shall secure the instruction in the Sungskritu (Sanskrit) language of all native Christian youth admitted, and of a certain number in Arabic and Persian, for which purpose the ablest native teachers shall be retained in these languages, at adequate salaries.
- b) It shall secure their being further instructed in the various shastras of the Hindoos; and in the doctrines which form the basis of the Pouranic and Buddhist systems. They shall also be instructed in those which relate to Hindoo Law.⁸³

We are not free here to investigate this issue in depth. Yet it is important to note that Carey did not foresee the very crucial role English was to play in the coming years in India.⁸⁴ In the 1830's the vernacularists lost the battle with Lord Macaulay aggressively promoting English education. Carey had tried to convince Alexander Duff to stick with vernacular; but as is now well known, Duff was convinced that through an excellent English education India could be won for the Lord Jesus and rejected Carey's plea. Historians see a definite switch in favor of English education beginning from the Macaulay era.⁸⁵

In the long run the admirable principles espoused in the Prospectus could not be carried out. Sanskrit lost to English as the language of learning. Serampore could not sustain education in the vernacular in the face of strong desire on the part of most Indians for English education. There were not enough Christian young people to train in ministry and non-Christian youth would not come for a system of education such as the one Carey

⁸³ Quoted in Ingleby, *Missionaries, Education and India*, 83.

⁸⁴ Neill, *Christianity in India: 1707-1858*, 200.

⁸⁵ Neill, *Christianity in India: 1707-1858*, 200.

envisaged. So “supply and demand” compelled Serampore to give up on vernacular education. Thus Serampore failed in one of its original vision.⁸⁶

In this process the key vision of the Trio, training of indigenous Gospel workers and pastors who will go to the ordinary people, also suffered a serious setback. By 1850, at the eve of the College being handed over to BMS, J. C. Marshman acknowledged openly that the College has moved far from its original purpose of training village pastors.⁸⁷

Dissatisfied with the condition of the College BMS severed the link with Calcutta University, stop admitting non-Christians to the College and tried to reintroduce training in the vernacular in 1883. The results were not encouraging.⁸⁸ Though the vernacular department continued it never flourished next to the English medium department.⁸⁹

There is no doubt that wide-spread introduction of English has changed the face of India for ever. Now there is no going back. English has become the official language of India and its constitution is written in English. ‘Indian English literature’ is recognized as unique by many Universities and India is now supposedly the “largest English speaking country in the world”.

Yet the issue of theologizing in the heart language (the vernacular) is still an important one. There are no easy solutions to this very serious problem.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Neill, *Christianity in India: 1707-1858*, 201.

⁸⁷ Ingleby, *Missionaries, Education and India*, 87.

⁸⁸ Ingleby, *Missionaries, Education and India*, 89.

⁸⁹ Ingleby, *Missionaries, Education and India*, 91.

⁹⁰ In Chapter Five we will discuss what we are trying to do for vernacular theological education and literature.

After the Serampore Trio

After the death of the Serampore Trio, the College went through many ups and downs. John C. Marshman, son of Joshua Marshman, one of the Trio, served the College faithfully served the College till 1855 when he went back to England. Before his departure he negotiated with the BMS and convinced the Society to take over the responsibilities of the College. In 1857 the College was affiliated to the newly formed University of Calcutta, the first college to be thus affiliated. The theology department continued to operate on its own, having its own curriculum, with its focus of training Christian youth for service of the Mission and Church, whereas the other departments followed the curriculum of Calcutta University and trained people for the service of the government.⁹¹

In 1892 one Mr. A.H. Bayness, the then Joint Secretary of the BMS, after his visit to the college recommended that it be moved from Serampore and all the property be liquidated. But saner minds prevailed and the institution was saved from extinction, primarily due to the wisdom of E.B. Underhill, who had served as a Secretary to BMS and who knew the critical role that the college was still playing in serving the Church in India.⁹²

Rev. E. S. Summers, a godly man, served as the Principal of the theological department (at this time the only department) of the college. As noted earlier, theology instruction was in Bengali. The class of 1884 averaged between 12 and 15 students.

⁹¹ Christados, *The Story of Serampore*, 30.

⁹² Christados, *The Story of Serampore*, 33.

There was great demand for the graduates, as missionaries were clamoring for trained workers to help them in the ministry.⁹³

The Second “Founding” of Serampore

1895, almost exactly a hundred years after the arrival of Carey, witnessed the arrival of George Howells, “the second founder of Serampore College.”⁹⁴ His original deputation was to serve in Cuttack, Orissa. During a visit to Serampore his heart was broken seeing the condition of the mission there. He wrote: “I felt glad that the authorities in London decided to send me to the backward Orissa rather than to Serampore with its dead hopes. A young man sees more hope in an uncultivated wilderness than in a graveyard filled with monuments to the mighty dead.”⁹⁵

But the Lord, in His providence, brought this energetic and capable leader to Serampore and he became the Principal of the College in 1906. Under his leadership (assisted also by Rev. William Carey, the great grandson of the founder), the higher theological department was opened in October 1910, and in 1911 intermediate arts classes were restarted in affiliation with Calcutta University. In 1912 application was submitted to the University to offer B.A. in English, Philosophy, Sanskrit, (all “pass and honors”) and in History, and Political Philosophy (both “pass”). The comment written by

⁹³ Christadoss, *The Story of Serampore*, 34.

⁹⁴ Christadoss, *The Story of Serampore*, 36.

⁹⁵ Christadoss, *The Story of Serampore*, 36.

the University Inspector on the application form read as follows: “There is no reason why Serampore should not be the Oxford College of Bengal.”⁹⁶

The Theology department also saw rejuvenation. Thirteen students were enrolled for B.D. degree representing various denominations such as Anglican, Baptist, Congregational, Methodist, Presbyterian and Syrian coming from all parts of India, including Madras Presidency.

During this time John R. Mott and the well-known Indian Bishop Vedanayagam Samuel Azariah visited the College and encouraged Howells. Father Geeverghese of the Syrian Church was appointed as a professor ensuring the cooperation of that ancient Church. 1911 may be marked as the year in which Serampore College became a truly interdenominational theological institution. In 1914 the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, the Church of Scotland Mission and the National Missionary Council of India all came on board to help the College.

December 4, 1915 witnessed a historic event in the history of the College: Bachelor of Divinity degree was conferred on three graduates for the first time in full exercise of the rights under the Charter of 1827.⁹⁷

1922 witnessed yet another severe financial crisis in which the College was almost closed down. Once again the Lord intervened just at the right time and saved the institution. By the time Howells retired in 1929 after serving as the Principal for twenty-two years Serampore College had become the major theological training center in India exerting wide influence over all the major Protestant denominations. Howells wrote the

⁹⁶ Christadoss, *The Story of Serampore*, 37.

⁹⁷ Christadoss, *The Story of Serampore*, 38.

following in 1928 on the occasion of the celebration of the Centenary of the granting of the Charter by the Danish Crown:

The work of our Higher Theological Department, as carried on during the last seventeen years on the new interdenominational basis, has been particularly encouraging. . . . Among . . . students we have representation of twelve nationalities, speaking as many different vernaculars, and they hail from an area extending from the hills of Assam to the valleys of Travancore and the sea coasts of Ceylon, while as many as nine branches of the Christian Church are represented.”⁹⁸

Bishop’s College

While we are unable to deal in detail about this very important institution that was established almost the same time as the Serampore College, we must take note a few very important points. The inspiration for founding the College came from Bishop Thomas Middleton, the first Bishop of Calcutta. In a letter dated November 16, 1818 that he wrote to the secretary of Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG) Bishop Middleton laid out his vision for the College:

1. To train native and other Christian youth in the doctrines and discipline of the church, in order to becoming preachers, catechists, and schoolmasters.
2. To give English education to young Hindus and Muslims, the propagation of English knowledge in India being conducive to the progress of civilization and Christianity.
3. To promote translation of the Scriptures, the Liturgy, and improving books and tracts.
4. To make a home for missionaries on their first arrival in India.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Mrs. W. Stewart, “The Theology Department, 1929-1960,” in *The Story of Serampore and its College* (Serampore: The Council of Serampore College, 2005), 75.

⁹⁹ Neill, *Christianity in India: 1707-1858*, 264.

In spite of Middleton's point # 2, unlike the Serampore College, Bishop's College opened on March 9th, 1824 as purely a theological college with just four students of whom only one was a pure Indian. By 1835 the number of students rose to fifteen and back to nine in 1839.

CMS missionaries often fiercely criticized Bishop's College as a 'Europeanizing' center. One CMS missionary, Daniel Corrie, wrote that the College was producing 'a poor irreligious clergy, likely to become a scourge instead of a benefit.'¹⁰⁰ CMS, the evangelical wing of the Church of England had strong differences of opinion with SPG, the more 'High Church' wing, so much so that CMS tried to launch a seminary of its own in Calcutta in 1836; but it was closed down in just a year.

The lessons to be learned from Bishop's are similar to those to be learned from Serampore College once it was Anglicized. Graduates were no longer willing to go back to their native villages as they had gotten used to a higher standard of living in the College.¹⁰¹ The ones that were willing to go expected very high salaries. When an average family in a parish was making Rs. 5 a month, a graduate from the College expected to receive Rs. 80 per month.¹⁰² The tendency among the graduates was to live like Europeans. Thus, their lives were cut off from the normal standard of living practiced by most Indians. This reinforced the perception of ordinary Indians that Christianity is European and Hinduism is Indian.

¹⁰⁰ Neill, *Christianity in India: 1707-1858*, 265.

¹⁰¹ Ingleby, *Missionaries, Education and India*, 108-109.

¹⁰² Ingleby, *Missionaries, Education and India*, 108-109.

Unfortunately, by middle of the century, the College lost sight of the function for which it was founded.¹⁰³ It was revived in conjunction with the Senate of Serampore in 1917 and has since been a part of the Serampore family.

Later Developments

In the meantime, in 1910, the United Theological College (UTC) came into existence in Bangalore, recognizing the fact that the Church was strongest in South India and a major theological institution in the South was needed to serve the Church there. It is noteworthy that the first Principal was a Dane, L.P. Larsen, “an excellent Tamil scholar, a thoughtful preacher, a well-read theologian, a man of God.”¹⁰⁴

Bishop’s College in Calcutta, founded by Bishop Thomas Middleton in 1820 (first students admitted on March 9th, 1824) but which had almost become nothing more than a hostel for university students, also was brought back to life in 1918 as a theological training center by the Anglicans. American Methodists opened Leonard College in Jabalpur providing a theological training center for north central India.¹⁰⁵

Using the Charter given by the King of Denmark giving the Serampore College the status of a University (which was reaffirmed by Serampore College Act of 1918 by the Bengal Legislative Council) fifty three theological seminaries and colleges in India are now affiliated to the Senate. In 2008-2009 academic year six thousand three hundred

¹⁰³ Neill, *Christianity in India: 1707-1858*, 266.

¹⁰⁴ Neill, *Christian Missions*, 441.

¹⁰⁵ See Chapter Two for a brief discussion of the beginnings of Roman Catholic theological education in India- first college established in 1540 or 1541 in Cranganore- as well as the establishment of the first Syrian Orthodox Seminary in Kottayam in 1815.

ninety-five (6,395) students were enrolled in various courses in these fifty three schools that are spread across the whole subcontinent.¹⁰⁶

At least eighteen universities in India have recognized the degrees granted by Serampore.¹⁰⁷ More over almost all the major Universities in England, Germany, Scandinavia, USA, Australia, Denmark, and Canada recognize and accept Serampore degrees equivalent to theirs and admit Serampore graduates to their Ph.D. programs.¹⁰⁸ William Carey would certainly be gratified to see the influence of the school he and his colleagues started and paid such a high price to see its nurture and growth.

Asia Theological Association (ATA)

As the number of evangelical theological institutions increased, many felt that the Serampore system was rather rigid and leaning more to the liberal side. So in 1968 a consultation was called in UTC, Bangalore to seek alternatives. The consultation suggested the development of more autonomous theological colleges that could develop their own courses, methodology of teaching, and conduct their own examinations and at the same time maintain excellence in academics. But due to lack of infra-structure, funds, and other essentials none of the institutions could take up this suggestion.¹⁰⁹

The Theological Commission of the National Christian Council of India (NCCI) was concerned about the number of Bible Colleges and Seminaries in India that were not

¹⁰⁶ *Proceedings of the Theological Senate and its Committees: January 16, 2008 to December 10, 2008: Book XXI, Vol. XX* (Serampore: Senate of Serampore College, 2009), Appendix III, 1-138.

¹⁰⁷ Tiwari, *Senate of Serampore College at Ninety*, 7.

¹⁰⁸ Tiwari, *Senate of Serampore College at Ninety*, 7.

¹⁰⁹ Emmanuel E. James, "Theological Education in India: A Brief Survey", *AETEJ Journal* 5 no. 1 (January – April, 1992): 14.

part of the Serampore and at the same time were training large numbers of leaders for the Church. In an attempt to coordinate and help these institutions NCCI formed the Board of Theological Education (BTE). BTE was formed as a semi-autonomous body with the goal of bringing all schools that offer at least L.Th/B.Th. level courses under its umbrella. In cooperation with the Senate of Serampore BTE set up an Accreditation Commission with the goal of helping all non-affiliated schools to evaluate themselves and improve their standards.¹¹⁰ But this attempt did not yield much fruit and BTE of NCCI was eventually wound up. This once again put a number of schools without any accreditation or affiliation.

Asia Theological Association (ATA) developed to help such evangelical/Pentecostal institutions, not only in India but in Asia as a whole. The following is a statement of “Commitment” printed in the opening pages of ATA Manual of Accreditation: “ATA is committed to serving its members in the development of evangelical, biblical theology by strengthening interaction, enhancing scholarship, promoting academic excellence, fostering spiritual and ministerial formation and mobilizing resources to fulfil God’s global mission within diverse Asian cultures.”¹¹¹

It is described as “a body of theological institutions, committed to evangelical faith and scholarship, networking together, to serve the Church in equipping the people of God for the mission of the Lord Jesus Christ.”¹¹²

¹¹⁰ James, “Theological Education in India: A Brief Survey”, 14.

¹¹¹ *Asia Theological Association Manual for Accreditation: Revised November 2001* (Singapore: Asia Theological Association, 2001), 1.

¹¹² *Asia Theological Association Manual for Accreditation*, 1.

The process of forming ATA began with a consultation in Hong Kong from December 27, 1973 to January 4, 1974 and ten schools were accredited in 1982.¹¹³ By 2004 there were one hundred and sixteen institutions accredited by ATA all through Asia. Of these forty-seven are listed in India in the 2001 edition of the *Accreditation Manual*.¹¹⁴

A number of distinct values are listed by ATA which are divided into four categories: administrative (seven values), relational (four values), theological (three values), and educational (three values).¹¹⁵

There was high hope among evangelicals and Pentecostals when ATA came into being. It is disheartening to say that ATA has not fully lived up to that hope. While a number of schools that are accredited by ATA have maintained excellence in academics several others have not.¹¹⁶ My humble opinion is that the goals and values that were set when it began have not been strictly maintained. I am very sorry to say that the standard of a few ATA institutions that I personally know is rather low. I am saying this as a person who would really like to see ATA becoming more credible. There is a real need in India for a stronger voice for evangelicals who are committed to excellence in academics *and* to the upholding of the authority of Scripture.

¹¹³ Bong Rin Ro, "A History of Evangelical Theological Education in Asia (ATA): 1970-1990", *Torch Trinity Journal* 11 no.1(2008): 34. Dates given in this work differ from those given in the accreditation manual cited above, in which the founding date is given as 1970 and beginning of accreditation is said to have begun in 1978. See *Asia Theological Association Manual for Accreditation*, 5.

¹¹⁴ *Asia Theological Association Manual for Accreditation*, 51-52.

¹¹⁵ *Asia Theological Association Manual for Accreditation*, 8-9.

¹¹⁶ I do not at all mean to be overly critical in my evaluation. If I come through as judgmental or as putting down my brothers and sisters in ATA I want to ask pardon. That is not my intention at all. My desire is to see ATA becoming strong to provide quality leadership in theological training.

On the positive side, ATA has brought some uniformity to theological training in institutions that have come under its umbrella and has helped a number of institutions to become better than they were before. However, it has not yet become strong enough to give a credible option for theological institutions that want to hold on to the authority of Scripture and excellence in academics. One can only hope that ATA will begin to tighten its standards and demand the institutions under its wings to develop infra-structure such as qualified faculty and library to train leaders who are spiritually *and* academically well prepared.

One also hopes that the Senate of Serampore and ATA would really sit down with each other and come to a mutual understanding whereby the two bodies will not look at each other with suspicion, but rather find ways to work together to help the Church at large in training well qualified leaders who are committed to the authority of Scripture and who love the Lord Jesus Christ and His Church with all of their hearts, mind, soul and strength. Brutal honesty does not permit me to state that the relationship between the two bodies is where it ought to be. As Christians why do we not show the same respect to each other that we often show to people of other faiths when we engage in dialogue with them? If we genuinely believe in the unity of God's people should we not extend Christian love and respect to our brothers and sisters who differ with us in some points of theology? Is there not room in India for two or more bodies to work in the field of theological education? I am convinced that Serampore or ATA alone will never be able to provide adequate number of trained workers for the Lord's vineyard in India. We need far more institutions at all different levels of training to provide desperately needed leaders for the Church in the Indian subcontinent.

ACTS

Ken Gnanakan, a prominent evangelical Christian leader in India, proposed “a new model for theological education” through his ministry known as ACTS.¹¹⁷ ACTS is an acronym for Agriculture, Crafts, Trade and Studies. His goal was “raising up practical, self-supporting witnesses; those who will get right into the heart of the villages and needy towns of India to work and live alongside people and to share with them the message of Jesus Christ.”¹¹⁸ Gnanakan’s vision and goals are really admirable. Lack of self-supporting workers for the preaching of the Gospel and planting churches is a key weakness of the Indian Church, especially in the unreached areas of India. Most of the churches that are planted in unreached rural areas of India cannot support a full-time pastor. Therefore if we can train bi-vocational church planters and send them to such areas they will be able to provide for their families through the trade in which they are trained and plant churches. This is the essence of Gnanakan’s vision.

If his proposals are taken seriously by more theological educators it would certainly make a major difference in developing self-supporting Christian leaders, particularly ‘tent-making’ missionaries who can reach unreached villages and towns. I pray that more people would pay attention to his proposals. It is disheartening that so far the impact of ACTS on theological education and Christian leadership training in India is not significant.

¹¹⁷ See Ken Gnanakan, *ACTS Institute: A New Model for Theological Education: Uniting Work, Worship and Witness*, (Taichung, Taiwan: Asia Theological Association, 1982).

¹¹⁸ Gnanakan, *ACTS Institute*, 2.

Conclusion

From this brief survey of theological education and Christian leadership training in India we can learn many valuable insights that would help us in tackling the challenges we face in developing effective ways to train leaders in our own day.

Can we learn from the example of the St. Thomas Christians' ancient way of training leaders? If we are able to emulate the master-disciple (*guru-sishya*) relationship in training that was the genius of the Malpanate system won't that solve a lot of problems we see in the prevalent paradigms of training?

It is to be noted that there are now many pastors even in the West training their disciples following somewhat the same model. Though they do not live with them twenty-four-seven, they spent considerable time with the senior pastor and learn mostly by observing. I personally know at least one very successful pastor in the US who has trained a young person using this method. The young disciple is now slowly stepping in to pastor the very large church even though he has no formal theological training.

One of the disadvantages of the Malpanate system is that the number of candidates that can be trained in this way is limited. It also takes considerably long time to train leaders through this model. But if we can somehow capture the spirit of that system and apply it in today's seminaries and Bible Colleges that would eliminate a number of deficiencies in our prevalent systems of training.

The Tranquebar missionaries grasped some of the foundational principles that need to be regained in theological education and Christian leadership training if we are to see graduates with desired qualities. The first and foremost is love for the Lord, His

Church, and His Word. We can never over-emphasize this. Their insistence that every trainee be thoroughly familiar with the Word of God must be brought back to our training institutions. They also insisted that the trainees teach little children during their training period itself. This shows the importance they placed on practical training. How desperately we need to emphasize this aspect of training today!

When we come to William Carey and the Serampore example we see many of the same principles that the Tranquebar missionaries practiced. Emphasis on the availability of the Word of God in the heart-language of every people group, theological education in the vernacular, training leaders for illiterate and semi-literate village congregations, and establishing primary and secondary schools to reach the unreached with the gospel are all key principles that we need to regain if we are to fulfill the Himalayan task that is before the Indian Church.

CHAPTER FOUR: HISTORY OF BSS, NTC, AND CEA: MODALITY AND SODALITY WORKING TOGETHER

Introduction: A Humble Beginning

On July 15, 1987 about ten o'clock in the morning a small group of Christians gathered together in Kulhan village at the outskirts of the beautiful city of Dehra Dun. Though the village is situated at the incredibly beautiful foothills of the Himalaya Mountains and scenery all around is picturesque, the piece of land on which we had gathered was rather unimpressive; even mango trees were refusing to grow on it. The only reason we had gathered on this particular spot was because the owner of the land, Dr. Goyal, a Hindu medical doctor who still has a clinic in downtown Dehra Dun, had become frustrated in trying to sell it. As a result he had reduced the price of the land to less than one third of the going rate in the area. The reduced price was one of the reasons that attracted us to the property.¹

We were there, in one of the northern most cities of India, to break grounds to construct a Christian leadership training center in fulfillment of the call of God on my life that I had received twenty years earlier while being a university student in the South Indian city of Kochi. The chief guest for the occasion was Mr. Steve Woodworth, my former boss from World Vision USA. It is an amazing story indeed, how God called one of the least likely persons, born and raised in an insignificant village in Kerala, a South Indian state, took him all the way to the US and provided necessary training and brought

¹ God had given us a clear sign for the place that He had prepared for us in north India through a model that an architect friend, Mr. Carl Mantl, had built in Los Angeles. It is this sign that led us to the property to begin with. Details are given in the Appendix.

him back to one of the northern-most cities of India, to establish what has now become an influential evangelical theological seminary in North India and a rapidly growing church-planting movement.

The history of Bharat Susamachar Samiti (BSS), Luther W. New Jr. Theological College which is commonly known as New Theological College (NTC) and Christian Evangelistic Assemblies (CEA) is the story of a series of miracles.² It is a story of modality and sodality working together. When I look back at the two decades that have gone since that day I am amazed at all that the Lord has accomplished by the very small and humble beginning we had.

Call and Vision

The vision that the Lord had given my wife and I was very clear: train, send, and support national Christians to plant churches among every unreached people groups and places of the Indian subcontinent. I had received the call and vision to serve the Lord in north India when I was nineteen while studying for my bachelor's degree in the University of Kerala. It developed and crystalized during my days of study at Fuller Theological Seminary and working with World Vision USA in the seventies and eighties.

In the 1980s India had eight hundred million people who belonged to four thousand six hundred and ninety three castes and sub-castes (most common word in all

² Bharat Susamachar Samiti is a rough translation in to Hindi of Good News for India, the ministry that we organized in the US to generate prayer and financial support for the work in India. Luther W. New Jr., is the name of a gentleman in Elberton, Georgia whose widow, Mrs. Janie Fountain New gave us a substantial gift in memory of her late husband. She learned about our plans to build a Christian leadership training center in North India by reading an article that was published in the July-August 1986 issue of World Vision magazine. Please see the story in detail given in the Appendix.

Indian languages is “Jathi” and it is best translated as “ethnic groups”).³ It was estimated that almost half of these ethnic groups did not have any gospel witness at all. Of the four hundred and fifteen languages that were spoken as mother tongue by the Indian people over one hundred and fifty did not have even portions of the Scripture translated in to them.⁴ Most of these people groups and languages are in North India. We knew that the Lord had called us to do everything we can to reach as many of these unreached groups as possible by training workers for the Kingdom.

Both my wife and I were born and raised in St. Thomas Christian families in the state of Kerala which is home to the largest number of Christians in India. Our exposure to North India was very limited.⁵ We knew that it would be very challenging to move to North India to establish a ministry of theological education and Christian leadership training as we were “foreigners” there, unfamiliar with culture and very weak in Hindi, the dominant local language. Therefore we started praying fervently for God’s clear guidance as to which part of North India we should choose. My wife and I faithfully prayed the following prayer every day: “Lord lead us to the exact place in North India where you want us to serve you.” We had no idea that the Lord was going to answer our prayer precisely, in ways we did not even imagine.⁶

Yet God gave us grace to resign my job with World Vision USA on January 15, 1986. A few years later my wife also resigned her job with Bank of America and joined me fulltime in the ministry. God helped us to pioneer the ministries of BSS, NTC, and

³ See K.S. Singh, *Anthropological Survey of India*, 3 Vols. (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998).

⁴ M. Paul Lewis, ed., *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, (Dallas: SIL International, 2009).

⁵ My wife, Leela, worked as a school teacher in Kathmandu, Nepal for two years. I had never even visited north India before 1984. Please see the Appendix for more details of our background.

⁶Please see the Appendix for details.

CEA with the assistance of my nephew, George C. Kuruvilla (Babu) who had many years of experience serving as a cross-cultural missionary in north India. A number of other godly people from different denominations came forward to help us in formulating the structures that are necessary to meet with government rules and regulations.

First we registered Bharat Susamachar Samiti⁷ as an educational charitable society (non-profit corporation) with the government of Uttar Pradesh.⁸ The following seven people are the founding members of the Board: Rev. C. George (Chairman), Rev. George Chavanikamannil (Managing Director), Mr. Jacob Chacko (Secretary), Rev. George C. Kuruvilla (Treasurer), Rev. K.D. Bhutt (Member), Mr. Narendra Katare (Member), and Rev. T. J. Simon (Member). Later Rev. Sanjeev Ailawadi, Rev. Samuel Francis, Mr. Jacob George, Rev. T. Z. Kundan, Dr. Praveen Moudgill, Rev. C.B. Samuel, Dr. Victor Choudhrie and Dr. Joseph Gergan joined the Board. (Rev. K.D. Bhutt, Dr. Victor Choudhrie and Dr. Joseph Gergan no longer serve on the Board). We are deeply grateful to these men for their guidance and leadership in seeing our vision become a reality.

Several of the Board members actively helped us to locate the property that we were standing on the day of ground-breaking. God had shown this property in a vision months earlier to an architect, Mr. Carl Mantl, a new believer who was attending our home church in Los Angeles. And Carl had made a replica of the land he saw and showed

⁷ See George C. Kuruvilla, "Reminiscing the Past, Envisioning the Future", in *Niyog 2011*, ed. Sam Thomas (Dehra Dun: New Theological College, 2011), 20-27 for a more detailed treatment of BSS's early days.

⁸ In our early days Dehra Dun was in the state of Uttar Pradesh, the largest state of India by population (at that time one hundred and eighty million people). On November 9, 2000 Dehra Dun and surrounding areas became part of the newly formed 27th state of India, Uttarakhand. Dehra Dun is presently the capital of the new state.

it to me in October 1986 when I was setting out to look for land in India.⁹ It was either a truly amazing miracle or an incredible coincidence when we found a piece of property in Dehra Dun, India that matched the model that Carl Mantl made in Los Angeles. We choose to believe the former and took the model and the matching property as sure signs of God's guidance on our lives. The Lord not only showed the land to Carl months before we saw it, He also miraculously provided the resources to purchase it and construct the buildings for NTC.

It took about nineteen months to complete the first phase of the construction of the campus. On April 15, 1989 NTC was dedicated to the glory of God and service of humanity by the late Dr. Ted Engstrom, President-Emeritus of World Vision International, and Rev. Orvel Taylor, then President of Christian Evangelistic Assemblies USA. Both Dr. Engstrom and Rev. Taylor had greatly encouraged my wife and me in the pursuit of our vision. It was also a special blessing to have Mrs. Janie Fountain New and Mrs. Lucille Holliman, two women that the Lord used as part of the miracles that He performed to make the building of the college possible.

Birth of Christian Evangelistic Assemblies (CEA)

Even before the dedication of NTC we started church-planting ministry. This shows the top priority that we gave to the establishing of worshipping congregations in our over-all strategy. Since we had not yet started our own training programs we had to recruit church-planters who had received training from other institutions to begin planting churches.

⁹ See Appendix for details.

We started church planting work under the umbrella of Bharat Susamachar Samiti.¹⁰ Several people who shared our vision of reaching the unreached joined us. A few of the first ones to join us are: Pastors Mathews Varghese, Reji John, Alex Jacob, I.D. Suna, Lamuel Patnaick, Rajan Masih and Praveen Moni. Soon we had several congregations in the states of Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal.

Our original plan was to keep the modality and sodality under the same legal structure. The thinking was that such a structure would help us to keep the focus on church-planting even sharper. But we later discovered that it would be wiser to have a separate government registration for the church-planting work. So the founding Board was constituted on February 1, 1992 with the following members: Rev. George Chavanikamannil (Chairman and President), Dr. Sam Thomas (Vice President), Rev. K.J. Kuriakose (Secretary), Rev. Mathews Varghese (Treasurer and National Coordinator), Rev. Rajan Masih, Rev. I.D. Suna, Rev. Alex Jacob, and Rev. George C. Kuruvilla, and Rev. Praveen Moni. Christian Evangelistic Assemblies was registered a church ministry in New Delhi.¹¹ Soon Rev. Simon Samuel and Rev. Varghese Samuel joined us.

Even before the formal registration we had started planting churches. CEA's first national conference was held in New Theological College campus from February 2 to 5, 1992. Rev. Carl Adams, Foreign Missions Director, Christian Evangelistic Assemblies USA was the main speaker for this first convention. Since then every year CEA's annual pastors' conference is held in NTC in conjunction with the college graduation. Such

¹⁰ See Varghese Samuel, "Christian Evangelistic Assemblies: Celebrating God's Faithfulness for 20 Years", in *Niyog 2011*, ed. Sam Thomas (Dehra Dun: New Theological College, 2011), 29-35 for a more detailed history.

¹¹ Registration was sanctioned on June 9, 1992.

common gatherings help to solidify the close relationship of the modality with the sodality.

Growth and Expansion of New Theological College

The first two objectives of the college as given in the *College Prospectus* are the following:

1. Proclamation of the Gospel. The core of the New Theological College's vision is the proclamation of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit to all unreached people groups of India. We want to see the Church of Jesus Christ established among every ethnic group ("jathi")¹² in accordance with Matthew 24:14; 28: 19-20 and Revelations 5:9-10. . . .
2. Training Laborers for the Lord's Vineyard. To see this vision of reaching all the peoples of India with the Gospel fulfilled, God has given us the primary responsibility of training men and women 'to prepare God's people for the works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ' (Ephesians 4:12, 13).¹³

The first formal course to be offered in NTC was a course taught by Dr. Ted Engstrom on Christian Leadership and Time Management. Eighty invited Christian leaders from all over India attended this course and with it NTC had begun its ministry.

Following that we conducted our first pastor's conference (April 17 to 23, 1989) in which Dr. Orvel Taylor, Pastor Paul Adams and others ministered. From May 10 to June 10, 1989 the first Summer Bible School and Youth Camp were held. A number of seminars such as "Christ in Vedas and other Hindu Holy Books" by Dr. Joseph

¹² Jathi is the most common translation of *εθνος* in all major Indian languages.

¹³ *Prospectus: Luther W. New Jr. Theological College 2004-2005* (Dehra Dun: New Theological College, 2004), 12-13. *Prospectus* is the word used for catalog in India.

Padijarekkara, “Study of Islam” by Dr. Sam V. Bhajjan, and “Spiritual Gifts and Today’s Church”, by Pastor William Schultz followed in 1989.

First diploma¹⁴ course called Discipleship Training Course (DTC) was offered from January 15 to May 15, 1990 with 23 students. On July 25, 1990 the second DTC batch of 33 students arrived and God used them to mold our understanding of theological education significantly.¹⁵ Later we introduced a Mission Orientation Course and in due course of time these two courses were amalgamated to form the Church Planters Certificate course. In 1991 we started a “double degree” program through which a hard working student could earn a Bachelor of Theology (B.Th.) degree offered by NTC and a Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) degree offered by Indira Gandhi Open University, a well-respected university in New Delhi. The B.Th. degree was accredited by Asia Theological Association (ATA) in 1998 and affiliated by the Senate of Serampore in June 2003. NTC started to offer Bachelor of Divinity (B.D.) degree course in 1999 and it was affiliated to the Senate of Serampore in June 2003. In 2004 we started a B.Th. degree in Hindi medium and it received affiliation from the Serampore Senate in January 2008. Master of Divinity (M.Div.) course was launched in 2005 and it received provisional accreditation for five years from ATA in 2006. In June 2009 NTC started the Senate of Serampore College’s integrated B.D. program through which a high school graduate can earn a Bachelor of Divinity degree in five years.

¹⁴ The term diploma in India indicates a short course, usually less than one year in duration, as against a degree course which is two to four year in duration.

¹⁵ This group of students played a key-role in the history and development of NTC. We will say more about that in the concluding chapter.

NTC is getting ready to offer M.Th. in the disciplines of New Testament and Theology beginning with the academic year 2011-2012, pending the final approval from the Senate of Serampore.

We began in 1989 with a students and just Babu and I as full-time faculty members and two or three supporting staff. Soon we grew to the maximum capacity of our infrastructure that we were forced to add dormitories, class-rooms, library, larger chapel and dining hall, married student quarters, and faculty apartments. When we dedicated the school we had six buildings in the campus that consisted of 5.9 acres. Now the campus has grown to over twenty acres in which we have twenty-five buildings and our community has grown to well over three hundred and fifty with two hundred and sixty students, twenty-eight full time faculty members and forty plus supporting staff.

When we look back to that humble beginning on July 15, 1989 we are amazed at what the Lord has done. In this short time NTC has undoubtedly become a preeminent evangelical theological seminary in North India. Our graduates have planted hundreds of congregations and are serving in key leadership positions in many denominations and ministries. As of April 2010, a total of 1,072 have completed either a diploma or a degree course from New Theological College.

Strategic Decisions That Shaped BSS/NTC/CEA

Looking back at our two decades of history I can see the sovereign hand of the Lord directing us step by step to bring us where we are now. The following are some of the decisions that we made that have turned out to be strategic. We cannot take credit for these decisions as if we are smart enough to make them on our own.

The Lord also blessed us with very godly and committed coworkers without whom BSS/NTC/CEA would never have become what it is today. We are blessed with a number of very high caliber leaders who share our vision of reaching the unreached and planting churches. They have chosen to serve in the difficult field of north India. I am very grateful to the Lord for them and give all the glory to the Lord alone for His grace and mercy that guided us and helped us thus far.

Training Closely Linked with Church-Planting

The most important strategic decision we took at the very beginning of the implementation of our vision was to closely link theological education/Christian leadership training with church-planting. The vision that motivated me was and is seeing churches planted among unreached people groups and in unreached places. Fulfilling the Great Commission in the Indian subcontinent is the passion that drives me. Theological education for the sake of just producing people with theological knowledge is not a very exciting idea for me.

Theological education and Christian leadership training must result in people coming to Christ and in worshiping groups being established. For this to happen, I am convinced that we must closely link learning with doing. Learning must take place not

only from books and lectures, but also from observing ministry in action. Trainees must be exposed to what actually happens in mission fields on a regular and ongoing basis. Even while they are enrolled in academically oriented courses trainees must be exposed to needs in the fields. This would prevent them from becoming insulated and out of touch from realities of everyday life. And such exposure would keep on reminding them of their call to ministry and the purpose for which they are being trained which in turn would prevent their zeal from diminishing.

With this conviction we established a very close link with theological education that is taking place in NTC and its satellite training centers (sodality) with church-planting work that is taking place through the modality (CEA). As the leadership of the sodality and modality is more or less identical we have been able to integrate training and church ministry to the maximum possible extent. As a result of the working together of the sodality and modality we have seen some amazing things happen. We will illustrate this with some specific examples as we reflect on missiological implications of the working together of modality and sodality.

Christendom Model or Missionary Model?

As stated earlier, our *primary* purpose for theological education and Christian leadership development is to train laborers who would reach the unreached people groups and places and plant new churches. This model of training is often described as missionary model, as against the so-called “Christendom model” that focuses on training leaders for existing congregations. At the same time, early on in our history, we made a decision to serve the whole Church in North India. Do we not have a responsibility to the

so-called “nominal” Christians of North India? Should we not do everything we can to awaken them from their spiritual slumber?¹⁶ Though the Christian community in North India is a very small fraction of the population, still there are Christians in almost all the major cities, most belonging to “mainline” denominations. And many of these, though they are Christians in name, neither have an adequate knowledge of the Gospel or personal relationships with Christ. Therefore, we decided not to ignore these existing Christians and their congregations. We decided to do all we can to serve them also. After all there is only one Church, the Body of Christ.

In other words we chose a combination of the two models as our goal: train pioneers who would reach unreached people groups and places (“missionary model”) and also those who would go to existing congregations with the goal of awakening nominal Christians and strengthening believers (“Christendom model”.) We did this with the conviction that we are called to serve the whole Church and if all of the existing North Indian Christians can be spiritually awakened they would form a significant force in reaching the remaining unreached people groups and places of the sub-continent.¹⁷

¹⁶ We are not by any means asserting that ALL North Indian Christians are “nominal”. There are many wonderful believers in North India in all major denominations who love the Lord with all of their heart, mind, soul and strength and who are doing all they can to reach others for Christ. At the same time, it is common knowledge that there are many clergymen and lay people who have lost all their Christian testimony and who are openly fighting for land and buildings that Western missionary societies have bequeathed to the Church.

¹⁷ It is encouraging to report that a number of NTC graduates have become ordained clergy with several “mainline” denominations in North India and God is using them to bring revival in their places of ministry.

“Double-Degree” Program and Affiliation to the Senate of Serampore

In 1986, early on in my study of the condition of the Church in the area, I was shocked to find out that though the number of Christians in the North Indian state of Punjab was rather significant, there were very few native Punjabi ordained clergymen in the Church of North India (CNI). I was told that CNI had to depend on seminary graduates from South Indian states to fill the vacancies it had in its parishes.

As quite a few Punjabi Christians are from poor families, very few were able to pursue college education. Without a college degree one could not even apply for admission in a seminary for B.D. or equivalent studies. Therefore CNI in Punjab was not able to send many candidates to seminary. This was the major reason for the Punjabi CNI not having enough seminary trained workers to take up existing parishes, let alone to do pioneer church-planting work.

I felt compelled to do what I can to change this situation and strengthen the Church in Punjab. If we were to make any significant contributions in the strengthening of the leadership of the North Indian Church at large NTC needed to do two things. We needed to provide opportunity for as many Christian young people as possible from North India to earn a university degree *and* a seminary degree.

As a first step towards accomplishing this goal NTC started offering “double degree”¹⁸ programs in 1991. Through this program we are able to provide opportunity for our students to not only earn a Bachelor of Theology (B.Th.) degree that is offered by

¹⁸As the name “double degree” indicates students who enrolled in this program simultaneously earned two degrees.

NTC¹⁹ but also to earn a university degree from Indira Gandhi Open University, New Delhi, a very prestigious institution that is offering various degrees in many disciplines.

If we are to fulfill our vision of serving the whole Church in India the next logical step to take was affiliating NTC with the Senate of Serampore College.²⁰ The reason is that the so-called “mainline” denominations of India such as the Church of North India would ordain only candidates with a Serampore degree.²¹ If NTC is not affiliated to the Senate then our graduates will not be ordained to the ministry by a number of these “mainline” denominations.

As discussed in chapter three, Serampore College is the institution founded by the famous Serampore Trio²² for the express purpose of training Indian Christians to be laborers for the Lord’s vineyard in the Indian subcontinent and neighboring countries. The Serampore College was given the status of a university by the charter that it received from the Danish king in 1827 and later renewed by the 1918 Act of the Bengal Legislative Council (British).

Considering the vision of William Carey and the original intention with which the college was founded, affiliating NTC with Serampore ought to have been a very easy decision. But it was not an easy decision. What made the decision a difficult one is the fact the original vision of Carey and his colleagues has been at times compromised by

¹⁹ In 1991 the B.Th. degree that NTC offered was not accredited. But since we also provided opportunity for the students to earn a B.A. degree from Indira Gandhi Open University, many of our early graduates have gone for further studies, at least two of them earning doctoral degrees from prestigious institutions.

²⁰ The governing body that has authority to affiliate seminaries and Bible Colleges to Serampore College is known as the Senate of Serampore.

²¹ Affiliation of institutions in India is very different from the West. Every Senate of Serampore affiliated institution has to follow the same syllabus (curriculum) and all the students in all the affiliated schools must write examinations from centrally set question papers and their answer scripts are evaluated following a “blind system” centrally coordinated by the Senate.

²² William Carey, Joshua Marshman and William Ward.

those who came along to lead Serampore in its later history. Carey was particular that any person who is to serve in leadership of the college must affirm without hesitation the fundamentals of the Christian faith as he and his colleagues believed. But as time went on some in leadership of the Senate were not people who would affirm Carey's faith.

But once we decided that we are to serve all the denominations including the "mainline" denominations the choice was rather easy. We had to either become an affiliated school or set aside one of the key elements of our vision. We chose the former even though one or two even in our own leadership still doubt the wisdom of that choice. I am convinced that the Lord called me to serve the whole of the Church of Jesus Christ in India and not to set aside any fellowship or denomination as unimportant. Thus the compelling reason for joining the Serampore family was this conviction that the Lord called us to serve all of His children and not to ignore anyone.

There is yet another reason for affiliating with the Senate of Serampore. Our vision is to train all five levels of leaders that the Church in India needs.²³ While those who are to serve in the lower levels of leadership might not require higher levels of theological education, people who are to occupy higher levels of leadership must have advanced training. As India is rapidly making incredible progress in education and economic development the Church cannot afford to ignore higher level theological training. We need more people with graduate, post-graduate, and doctoral degrees to meaningfully speak to a society that is rapidly developing. The fact is that, in spite of the welcome development of institutions like SAIACS, credible theological degrees that are widely accepted by all segments of the Church are offered in India only by Serampore.

²³ See David Bennett, *The Indian Leadership Study*, Unpublished paper, 2003.

Yet another factor also motivated me to press ahead with the affiliation decision. That was the conviction that it was strategically a blunder for the evangelicals to abandon Serampore. William Carey and the other pioneers of Serampore established the college with one goal alone: reach the subcontinent and the surrounding countries with the gospel. We who have the same passion for the gospel must do all we can to revive that vision and passion and not abandon Serampore. The task might not be easy; but then if we are to give up difficult tasks how can we do anything for the Kingdom?

*Ecumenical Training*²⁴

Even before the Lord brought me back to India from the US to start the ministries of BSS/NTC/CEA, He had laid it on my heart that we must serve the whole Church. I am very proud to be a Pentecostal preacher. At the same time I am fully convinced that the Lord Jesus Christ has only one Church. And that Church consists of members who belong to many denominations that we see all around us. Anyone who has given himself fully to the Lord Jesus and acknowledges Him as his Lord and Savior in accordance with the words of the Apostle Paul in Romans 10: 9-11 is a member of that Church universal.

Therefore, we wanted to serve that whole Church as much as possible. NTC describes its theological position with the following three words: “evangelical”, “inter-denominational”, and “charismatic”. We open our doors to anyone who would feel comfortable in such an environment to come to us and be trained in God’s Word. We

²⁴ I am using ecumenism/ecumenical in the sense in which it is defined by Timothy C. Tennent in his *Invitation to World Missions*, 49. See also Dietrich Werner, “Ecumenical Formation in Theological Education: Historical Perspectives”, in Dietrich Werner, David Esterline, Namsson Kang and Joshva Raja, eds., *Handbook of Theological Education in World Christianity* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2010), 104-110.

never turn away any candidate who would want to study with us because he or she cannot pay fees. A good number of our students are first-generation believers from Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, and Sikh families. Many of them are unable to pay any fees at all. Yet we gladly admit them because they love Jesus and want to serve His Church.

Focus on Church-Planting with Specialized Courses

Since our primary vision is seeing churches planted among every remaining unreached people groups of the Indian subcontinent we began the training programs in NTC with a course that is specifically designed to train church-planters. There is hardly any academic requirement for admission into this program: only a call to become a church-planter. Most of the trainees admitted for this course are semi-literate; some are even illiterate. We are not aware of any other seminary that admits such candidates for any of the training programs.

We are extremely pleased with the results of this program. Many semi-literate and illiterate people who completed this program have become very effective church-planters in rural areas of north India. Since the course is only one year in duration we are able to train larger numbers of workers through this program without heavy financial investment.

We have found from experience that we have received yet another unforeseen blessing from this program. One of the real dangers of theological education is becoming trapped in the academic prison-pursuing academics for the sake of academics. While the pursuit of academic excellence is extremely important and necessary for the healthy growth of the Church, undue and exclusive emphasis on it can lead to very unhealthy tendencies such as intellectual pride and propensity to look down upon the poor and the

marginalized. Having the semi-literate and illiterate brothers and sisters with us in the seminary has greatly helped us to counteract such temptations and remain focused on the real mission of the school.

Their presence in NTC adds something very special to the ethos of our community. We are reminded that the Church in North India largely consists of brothers and sisters who would identify more with the semi-literate or illiterate than with the ones who have advanced degrees. It also reminds us of the words of our Lord Jesus in Luke 10:21: At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure". (NIV)

Taking Missions Training to Mission Fields-Satellite Training Centers

We soon realized that there was no way we could admit all the applicants who applied to NTC for the church-planters training program due to two reasons. First, we did not have the infra-structure to admit all. Secondly, we discovered that removing these people from their environment even for a period of one year caused all kinds of difficulties for them. Culture shock and inability to adjust to the life in a seminary campus where they needed to use amenities that they were not familiar with such as toilets caused more difficulties than we ever imagined. On the other side, being away from their rural environment where there is no electricity or running water even for a year made it difficult for some to go back to their old way of life.

Moreover the need to train large numbers of church-planters forced us to think of ways in which we could accomplish that without investing huge sums of money to build infra-structure. Eliminating or at least reducing as much as possible culture shock and related issues was important to us. Therefore we decided to take the training to where the trainees were: we began to open Satellite Training Centers.

A typical Satellite Training Center is operated in one of the CEA church buildings and the person responsible for the center would be the pastor of the church. If the pastor is not equipped to do the job a person who is qualified would be appointed. Depending on the infra-structure of the building that is available ten to twenty candidates would be admitted for training. They would live right there in the church and eat together. Classes also would be conducted in the same building. Teachers from NTC would visit the satellite centers and help with teaching. In addition experienced pastors and church-planters helped us in training.

NTC and CEA operate up to twelve such satellite training centers at a time. These centers are not all permanent centers. They are operated according to the need and also according to the availability of resources. Centers are located in strategic areas where there is pressing need for multiplying laborers. We have found, once again from experience, that this is one of the most efficient ways in which church-planters can be trained in significant numbers without huge financial investment. Since the training is done as close to their native places as possible problems associated with cultural and linguistic adjustments become minimal.

Training in Vernacular

One sad reality about the Indian Church and her theological education and Christian leadership training is that she has not yet taken seriously what Ziegenbalg and Carey understood as extremely important-training in the vernacular. Not much is being done by the Serampore family or ATA in this regard.²⁵ There are a few small Bible schools here and there that offer training in the vernacular though these do not have accreditation or affiliation.

We are very glad that the Lord led us to begin NTC's training programs in 1989 with the first course that was offered in Hindi. We have insisted on Hindi being an integral part of theological education in NTC ever since, even though the temptation to give that up has been constant.²⁶ For the first several years we were able to offer only one-year certificate level courses in Hindi due to the lack of Hindi books and qualified people to teach in Hindi.²⁷ After much struggle we eventually started a B.Th in Hindi medium in 2004. Though it is continuing it is not as healthy as I would like to see it. But we are determined to do everything we can to make it strong as there are millions of believers whose heart-language is Hindi and we need to train laborers who can serve them in their heart-language.

²⁵It is gratifying that there are a very small number of schools within the Serampore family that provide opportunities for theological education in the vernacular primarily in South India. Much more needs to be done in this area to strengthen the Church in India.

²⁶ As William Carey himself found out, theological training in the vernacular in India is very difficult due to the popularity of English education. Carey was very disappointed that his own plans to stay with Bengali in Serampore College had to be abandoned. See chapter III.

²⁷ Though Hindi is the national language of India and over half a billion people speak it either as mother tongue or trade language there are very few Christian theology books of excellence published in Hindi. See below regarding our efforts to make a small contribution in correcting this problem.

The satellite centers that were mentioned earlier are all conducting their training in the vernacular. Presently we are training in at least four different vernacular languages- Hindi, Oriya, Santali and Punjabi.

Much more need to be done in developing theological education and Christian leadership training using regional languages of north India as the church is growing here. We are seeing remarkable growth of the Church in Bihar and Jharkhand, two states that were traditionally described as “grave yard” of missionaries. Same trend is seen in states like Uttarakhand where there never was a strong church; but now there are a number of congregations rising up. The dominant native tongue in the area of Uttarakhand where we are seeing major break-through is Garhwali. Training Garhwali speaking workers in Garhwali is imperative in making the Church strong here. BSS, NTC, and CEA are committed to doing all we can to develop training in these crucial areas.

Training Women

Early on in our ministry in north India we learned the critical importance of women in reaching the unreached people and places. When we visited villages for evangelism, if our team consisted of only men, women in the villages would literally turn their backs to us and refuse to talk or even look at us. Whereas, if there was just one woman in our team, we all would be warmly welcomed and offered tea! North India rural culture makes it almost impossible for a man to witness to a woman; it would be misunderstood and could lead to danger. But women can freely witness to other women.

The sheer fact that more than fifty percent of the members in any congregation are women ought to have led us to recognize the importance of women in evangelism and

church-planting and we ought to have given top priority in training them. But somehow the Protestant Church in India failed to do that for a long time.

Once again, the Lord gave us grace to be inclusive in our training and we began admitting women from our early days even though we had many difficulties with infrastructure. This also has proven to be a strategic decision that is contributing to fulfillment of our vision. Some of our most productive church planters have been women graduates.

Ongoing Training for Workers Who Are Already in the Field

A significant number of workers who are in the field in North India do not have advanced theological education. Many of them have only one or two years of basic training, some not even that much. So there is a genuine need for ongoing training for such workers. From the very beginning of our ministries we made a conscious decision to offer opportunities for ongoing training for field-based workers who are unable to leave their fields for longer periods of time.

Those who meet the minimum required academic qualifications can earn an accredited degree, Bachelor of Christian Studies (BCS), or a Diploma in Christian Studies from the Senate of Serampore just by attending a few contact classes in NTC and appearing for the examinations at the scheduled times.

For those who are not interested in degrees but want to attend ongoing training to sharpen themselves in ministry NTC and CEA together provides a number of opportunities. We regularly conduct seminars for Christian workers both on campus and in various off-campus locations. Duration of these seminars vary from one day to several

days. We also regularly conduct special regional and national conferences on specific themes that are useful for workers who are in the fields of ministry.

The Strategic Advanced Leadership Training (SALT) program offered in our satellite training center in Bhopal is another ministry that is available for ongoing training for workers who are already in the field. The courses in SALT are usually a week-long in which twenty to thirty workers can take classes in specific disciplines taught usually by expert visiting teachers from around the world. By attending a set number of these courses they can earn a diploma.

Translation and Publication of Hindi Books

As mentioned above though Hindi is the national language of India and there are millions of Hindi speaking Christians in the country, Hindi theological literature is very sparse. Until recently there was not even a basic concordance of the Bible in Hindi. This is a very serious problem. We decided that the most effective way to help the Hindi speaking Christians is by translating quality Christian books into Hindi. Therefore we established a translation and publication department as part of BSS and NTC with the goal of publishing books and literature to help all levels of Christian readers- simple gospel tracts, devotional books, basic Bible study books and advanced theological text books. A number of pamphlets and books have already been translated and published. We have also published some original works in Hindi. Much more needs to be done in this area in order to help the Hindi speaking Church to be all that God wants her to be.

School of Worship and Music

It might be surprising to many to learn that there were no seminaries in north India that offered any kind of formal training in worship and music. It goes without saying that worship and music are very important part of every Christian tradition that take up a good chunk of time in every service. Yet the Church in north India did not have any place where people could receive formal training for this important ministry. This again points to the weakness of the existing training programs in the Church as a whole in this region. Two years ago NTC launched a school of worship and music to fill this gap.

At present we are offering only one program in the new school: one year diploma in worship and music. This is because we have only one qualified permanent faculty member to teach this discipline. We are now depending on visiting teachers to meet the overwhelming demand as a large number of students want to take classes from this department. We hope and pray that someday NTC will be able to offer a degree in worship and music.

School of Languages and Linguistics

According to the Wycliffe Bible Translators India is still home to over one hundred and forty languages that do not have the Word of God translated into them. From our inception we have been very concerned about making the Word of God available to every person in their heart-language. It is very gratifying for us that several of our graduates have chosen Bible translation as the focus of their ministry. I myself have preached a

number of sermons in our chapel services encouraging graduates to commit their lives to serve a people group that does not have the Word of God in their own mother tongue.

Since we have given Bible translation such a high priority from the very beginning of our history, it was a very exciting and pleasant surprise for all of us to learn that Wycliffe Associates had chosen NTC as their preferred place to establish a school of languages and linguistics. A few months back we entered into a covenant with Wycliffe Associates whereby the decision was finalized. They are now helping us to build a twenty-thousand square feet building that would house the school in which training will be given to those who have a call for Bible translation ministry. October 2011 is the target date for the opening of the school. This is truly marvelous in our eyes and we know full well that it is the Lord's doing.

Combining the New and the Old

From the very beginning our passion has been to see men and women whom the Lord entrusts with us for training to be totally transformed and shaped for the Kingdom work. We were really aware of the short-comings of the traditional model of training.²⁸ And we wanted to avoid these pitfalls to the best of our abilities. At the same time we also knew that accredited and affiliated degrees are very important to the Indian Christians.²⁹ Therefore we had to work within the system if we were to make any significant impact on the Indian Church as a whole. So we consciously chose to use the

²⁸ See Chapter I.

²⁹ As already noted above almost all of the major denominations will ordain to ministry only a person with Serampore degree.

traditional model *and* creative new ways of training to be effective in fulfilling our call and vision.³⁰

We ventured into this with strong determination to do everything we can possibly do to alleviate as many deficiencies of the traditional model as possible. After two decades of this adventure we believe that we have been successful, at least to a certain extent, in what we set out to do. We are still struggling to perfect what we do and we cannot claim that we have arrived. Constant evaluation and correction are very much necessary to become the best we can be. The task that the Lord has entrusted with us is too important to assume that there is no better way to do it.

In this ongoing process of learning the following are a few things that we have tried to build into the DNA of our training in NTC. Once again we cannot claim that we have succeeded fully in seeing transformation of trainees as we would like to see. We still have men and women who stay with us for four years, complete the training, receive the diploma and yet do not experience the transformation that we desire in their lives. I hope that I am not wrong in affirming that the majority of the students do experience such transformation. I think this is evidenced by the fruit they have produced in their ministries.

Spiritual and Character Formation (“Heart”)

One of the constant complaints about theological education is that it drains the passion and zeal out of trainees. Many enter seminary with real zeal for the Lord and His

³⁰ Decision to affiliate NTC with Serampore is the clearest example of using the traditional model.

Church and at the end of three or four years go out with no zeal and fervor. This is a valid criticism, at least in the case of a few seminary graduates.

We have taken this criticism very seriously and are consciously doing all we can to alleviate this flaw in theological education. How can one become a leader in the Church if one's spiritual life and character are flawed? How can we ignore the emphasis placed on character in a leader's life in the Pastoral Epistles and elsewhere in Scripture? Therefore we have taken spiritual and character formation as one of our most important goals, not just as something that should happen as a bye-product of theological education, but rather as a specific goal that we strive for as part and parcel of our holistic training programs. We believe that academic excellence and spiritual/character formation must go hand in hand. These are the two wings of a bird. Both are important. Neither should be sacrificed.

Ministry Formation (“Hands”)

Along with strong emphasis we place on spiritual and character formation NTC places a premium on practical training as part of theological education. As we are training leaders who need to be serving the Church when they graduate and enter the field, doing needs to be part of the learning process. Theoretical learning alone will not prepare an effective Kingdom worker. Therefore a number of opportunities are built into the training program whereby trainees can put into practice what they are learning from classrooms and books.

A Practical Ministry Department is part of the infra-structure that we have created to make sure that opportunities are provided to every student to learn by doing. These opportunities include weekly outreach ministries conducted every Friday, weekend

outreach ministries where students are divided into teams and given specific responsibilities such as leading worship services or preaching in selected congregations, hospital visitation, street drama presentation, slum ministry, tutoring needy children, etc.

Another very important part of training in NTC is the required practical ministry for six weeks during every summer break and one whole semester in the third year of their degree course. These lengthy practical training must be done under the supervision of a pastor or another field worker who is approved by the concerned faculty committee. A faculty member will visit the student in the field and evaluate in person the training he or she is receiving. The attention and care we take in this area shows our conviction that theological education needs to be more than book or class-room learning.

Community life is another extremely important part of our training. All unmarried full-time students are required to be residents in the campus. We are slowly building enough married students' quarters so that all married students can also reside in the campus. We believe that this makes the training even more effective.

Disciplines of the Community Life

NTC has consciously planned and incorporated a number of events into the community life all through the training period to encourage the spiritual and character formation and ministry formation of its students in addition to the academic formation. A few of these are:

1. Organized daily morning and evening devotions.
2. Daily morning chapel services.
3. Monthly all-day fasting and prayer meetings.

4. Monthly all-night prayer meetings
5. Student organized and led “Abba-Father prayer meetings” that meet at least twice a week.
6. Monthly fasting prayer-walk for which selected trainees and faculty members go to a place targeted for a new church plant; they spend the whole weekend in that place praying.
7. Regular weekly planned outreach in which trainees have opportunities to exercise leadership, serve the needy and share the gospel.
8. Entire student-body divided into small Pastoral Care Groups each under the supervision of a faculty or staff member. These groups meet regularly (at least twice a month) when the students are encouraged to share their personal needs and problems so that others can pray for them and help them in whatever possible ways. These small groups also provide accountability structures that help the trainees.

Conclusion

God in His grace took what began with that groundbreaking ceremony on July 15, 1987 and blessed it to become an influential ministry in the Indian subcontinent. Hundreds of people have been trained and sent out to preach the Gospel and plant churches and lead other ministries of the Church. Scores of new congregations have been planted not only in India, but also in the neighboring countries of Nepal and Myanmar. Primary and secondary schools and orphanages have sprung up in some of the neediest places of North India and are serving very poor children in the Name of Jesus. NTC

graduates have pioneered a number of other ministries touching the lives of thousands of people. None of us who had assembled in that stunted mango garden on that hot and humid July day foresaw the impact that humble beginning would have on the Church in India in such a short time. It is all the Lord's doing and it is marvelous in our eyes.
(Psalm 118:23)

Of all the decisions that the Lord led us to make, the most important I believe, is the decision to do all that we do to serve the Church. We have strived from the beginning to work with the dual goals of planting churches where there is none and strengthening the existing congregations. While we can in no way claim that we have overcome *all* the weaknesses listed at the end of Chapter I, I believe that we have taken at least baby-steps toward that. For us to continue making progress we need to constantly remind ourselves the purpose for which the Lord has called us and look for ways to improve the close relationship of the sodality with the modality.

CHAPTER FIVE: LESSONS FROM TWO DECADES

Introduction

For those who are intimately involved in training servant-leaders for the Church the weaknesses that are inherent in the prevalent models of theological education/Christian leadership training are all too familiar.¹ As we have briefly narrated in Chapter 1, many studies have been undertaken to identify and overcome these weaknesses and strengthen the leadership training ministry of the Church. In spite of all those studies we still have not made significant progress in completely solving the problems.

As stated in Chapter One, our purpose in this study is not just to state these problems; it is also to propose a few solutions based on our personal observation and experiences from being involved in theological education/Christian leadership training and church planting in North India for more than two decades. We believe that what the Lord has done through BSS/NTC/CEA since 1986 has taught us a number of valuable lessons that would be useful for the Church at large.

The survey of both the Indian Church history (Chapter Two) and history of theological education (Chapter Three) has helped us to put our experiences in perspective. For example, the Malpanate system of leadership training of the early Christians in India taught us the importance of maintaining the *Guru-Sishya* relationship

¹ Edward Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983) traces the development of a number of weaknesses of the current system. See 3-23. See also Robert Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education: Exploring a Missional Alternative to Current Models*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 2-3.

in training and the advantages of the involvement of the whole community in the selection and training of the candidates. Vincent de Lago, the Franciscan priest and friend of Francis Xavier, who established the first theological seminary in India, taught us that respecting and serving the existing Christian traditions need to be a priority. We must not assume that we know best and push our agenda on to the ones who are already on the scene and doing their best for the Lord and His Kingdom. Lago's actions were motivated only with the goals that the Roman Catholic Church had. Of course, we need to judge him with his context in mind. It is sad to say that this tendency of promoting one's selfish goals is so evident even today among many who are leading ministries in India. It taught us that our struggle with establishing theological education in Hindi is very similar to the struggle that William Carey faced almost two hundred years ago when he tried to make Bengali the medium of instruction in Serampore College.

A Crucial Early Lesson

Because I was trained in a traditional theological seminary and was familiar only with such training patterns our plans were to start a similar training center. As narrated earlier my primary passion was to reach as many unreached people groups as possible with the gospel. Therefore training the maximum number of workers was my goal. But because of the limited resources we had we decided to begin training a small group.

As we were preparing to open New Theological College (NTC), the Lord led me to meet Dr. Victor Choudhrie, the then Director of Christian Medical College in Ludhiana, Punjab. Dr. Choudhrie is an accomplished surgeon and a well known Christian

leader in North India. God was doing something unusual in his life when I met him for the first time in 1987 or 1988.

When I told him of our plans to open up a seminary/Bible College in Dehra Dun he counseled me to think creatively and not to confine the new institution to traditional modes of training alone. He knew the rural North Indian Church much better than I did and was really concerned about the lack of trained indigenous leadership. He also knew that the North Indian rural congregations did not have many academically qualified young people who would meet the requirements of entrance into a seminary or Bible College. At the same time he was convinced that reviving the existing congregations in rural North India is a key to reaching the remaining unreached people groups and places of the region.

Convinced of the logic of his arguments I agreed to undertake an experimental training program in NTC. Dr. Choudhrie sent thirty young people from Punjab to us. They, along with two from Himachal Pradesh and one from West Bengal, formed the second batch of Discipleship Training Course (DTC) students of NTC, a total of thirty-three. None from Punjab had completed high school. Most were semi-literate. Some were even functionally illiterate! A few were in their thirties and one was in his forties. Most were in their twenties. Most were nominal Christians and did not know Jesus as their personal Savior. Some of them were really rough characters. We caught several stealing out of the campus to smoke and drink during their early days in NTC!

Our training method was very simple. With the kind of trainees we had we were forced to develop a non-academic model of training. So we focused on the simple truths of the Gospel. Emphasis was primarily on the heart and not on the head, being and not

knowing. Major emphasis was placed on one's relationship with Jesus and Christian living. As we were still in the very early stages of building the faculty for NTC we had to depend mostly on pastors and evangelists who came as visiting teachers.

The duration of the course was just five months- from July to December 1990. But what happened during those five months forever changed our perspective on theological education. Before the course was over most of the students who did not know Jesus as their personal Savior not only gave their lives to the Lord but also received a call for the ministry. The course so transformed these young people that it really surprised Dr. Choudhrie. Only later did he tell us the criteria he had used in selecting these young people.

Most of them were people who had approached him for a job in the Christian Medical College (CMC) hospital in Ludhiana, Punjab. He did not have any jobs for them. Yet he would interview them and during the course of the interview he would ask them very simple questions about their faith. He would ask them to name the books of the Bible or say the Lord's Prayer or something simple like that. Most of them did not pass even such a simple quiz. As he did not have any job for them he devised a plan to get rid of them by telling them that if they would attend a Bible School for a few months in Dehra Dun and then come back to him he would consider them for a job.

So the motive with which these young people had come to NTC was to somehow spend the five months there and then go back to CMC for a job. But, amazingly, at the end of the five-month training program not one went back to Dr. Choudhrie to ask for a job. Everyone had received such a clear call for ministry they all went back to their

homes to share the good news of the Gospel with their kith and kin. A number of them planted churches in their own villages or nearby communities.

Dr. Choudhrie has told me several stories of how later he met some of these young people. While he tried to avoid them for fear that they would ask him for a job, they would cheerfully share their testimony with him as to how the Lord changed them and that they do not want a job as preaching the Gospel was their priority.

One was from the village of Ajinala, a border village with Pakistan. His name was Nahor and he was a tailor. The simple truths of the Gospel that he heard transformed him completely that he decided not to do anything else but preach this Gospel. He went back to his village that was decimated by the civil war that was going on in Punjab. The village had many children most of whom had lost their fathers to the civil war. Nahor started a church for them under a tree. He had no infra-structure that is normally expected to be present for the starting of a church. Yet soon he had a growing congregation. Many Hindus and Sikhs came to the saving knowledge of Jesus. When Dr. Victor Choudhrie visited him a year or so later he had a congregation of over three hundred people.

The transformation in the young people so impressed Dr. Choudhrie that he kept on sending more for training. I remember another young man who attended the July 15 to December 15, 1991 batch. His name was Sikkandar. He was practically an illiterate. During the early weeks of the course Sikkandar met Jesus as his Savior. It so changed him that he was a marvel to the whole class. He had such passion to serve the Lord. He craved to read his Punjabi Bible. So he sought the help of one of his classmates and begged him to teach him to read. The classmate spent time with him helping him to learn

to read. Sikkandar spent days fasting and praying asking the Lord to teach him to read. Before the course was completed he was reading his Punjabi Bible well.

He went back and started a work among the young people and eventually built a church with over one hundred and fifty members. Later Sikkandar invited Dr. Choudhrie to preach for him. Dr. Choudhrie was so impressed with the quality of the congregation that he has repeated the story of Sikkandar on many occasions to me.

Experiences like these convinced us early on that to plant a church in a village like Ajinala one does not need a B.Th. or B.D. degree. What one needs is a basic grasp of the Gospel and fervor to share it with others. So NTC decided to continue this training program for people that were interested in serving the Lord and His Church regardless of their academic qualifications. We have been again and again pleasantly surprised to see exceptional achievements by graduates of the short courses that we offer (three months, five months, and one year). We discovered that this is a way to quickly multiply large number of workers for the Church. Therefore NTC continues to offer the short courses along with degree courses. As far as I know, NTC is one of the very few affiliated/ accredited seminaries in India that offers this type of training.

In addition to the on-campus short courses we started several satellite training centers in different parts of north India to multiply workers to meet the dire need for more laborers for the harvest. At present we operate at a time up to twelve centers in nine states of north India each of which is training a handful to twenty church planters. All these centers are either located in local churches or closely tied to a church-planting team and the training is done under the supervision of a local pastor or a church-planting team leader which helps greatly to overcome the “disconnect” between training and the Church

that was mentioned earlier. This also gives ample opportunities for the trainees to learn from observing and not just in theory.²

These early experiences led us to adopt a philosophy of training that has helped us, we believe, to at least partially overcome some of the weaknesses of traditional theological education/Christian leadership training mentioned at the end of chapter I.

Relationship of Modality to Sodality in BSS/NTC/CEA Ministries

Thus the Lord directed our steps to learn the truth that for the evangelization of the Indian subcontinent creative ways of training laborers is essential. The Lord also led us to create an environment of training that is different from most seminaries and Bible Colleges. From our very early days on God helped us to develop a close link between training and church-planting. Through this there emerged a structure in which Modality and Sodality coexisted, interacted and influenced each other in an organic manner.

Even before New Theological College started its training programs, the Lord led us to establish a church planting ministry, because as we envisioned it, establishing churches where there are no churches must be one of the top priorities of theological education/Christian leadership training. Therefore, in 1987- almost two years before classes started in NTC- we laid the foundations of a ministry that would send and support church planters who would go to needy areas in northern India and Nepal. For the first

² George Patterson in his article entitled "Extension Education for Church Multiplication" in *Church Growth in the Third World*, ed., Roger E. Hedlund (Bombay: Gospel Literature Service, 1977) emphasizes this aspect of training. His ideas on 'obedience oriented curriculum' are well worth listening to. Some of the ideas that he proposes are truly revolutionary. The article narrates the lessons he and his colleagues learned regarding theological education and church planting in Honduras. Some of the problems that the Church in India faces today are similar to the problems that Patterson and his colleagues faced in Latin America. Their thinking concerning theological education changed when confronted by the need to train large numbers of workers quickly as churches were multiplying rapidly.

five years the church planting ministry remained under the umbrella of BSS. In 1992 we bifurcated it and registered it as Christian Evangelistic Assemblies (CEA). In other words, for the first five years of our ministry in north India, Modality and Sodality structures were legally one structure, under one Board. The bifurcation became necessary because of government rules and regulations. This clearly shows our strong conviction that for theological training to be optimum in its effectiveness it needs to be closely tied to church ministry.

Even after registering CEA as a separate entity we do not look upon NTC and CEA as two independent entities. The two are working very closely with each other. Students are regularly exposed to congregations and pastors. They not only hear living testimonies of what is happening in the fields and are constantly encouraged to pray for field ministry, but also are given the opportunity to interact with those who are actually doing the ministry and visit the fields and see first-hand how ministry is done. We are actively looking for ways to create an atmosphere in which trainees are not just learning from books and lectures alone but from their interaction with those who are working in the fields and by observing how ministry is actually done.

With the goal of solidifying the relationship between Modality and Sodality and providing the maximum benefit to the trainees, a number of events are planned all through the academic year where members of both communities come together and learn from each other. For example, every month CEA church planters in Uttarakhand³ gather in NTC for their monthly meeting. Two leadership retreats of CEA pastors are held in

³ Uttarakhand is the name of the 27th state of India that was formed on November 9, 2000 by bifurcating the very large state of Uttar Pradesh. The state was originally named Uttaranchal. The new name which is mentioned in early Hindu scriptures was adopted by the Indian Parliament in December 2006. Dehra Dun, the city in which New Theological College is located is the capital of the newly formed state.

NTC every year. And NTC graduation has always been celebrated in conjunction with the annual conference of CEA. All these gatherings of church-planters in NTC, many of whom are NTC graduates, provide opportunities to the students to interact with and learn from them.

We are eager to expose our students to a wider circle of Christian ministries and workers and not just to those of CEA. So we invite men and women regularly, both from India and abroad, who are involved in various ministries to preach in the college chapel and to conduct special seminars. This helps us to keep the vision of ministry alive before the trainees all through their time in the college.

Our recent partnership with Wycliffe Associates (WA) is an excellent example of our ongoing attempt to closely link theological education/Christian leadership training with hands on ministry. We are now in the process of establishing a school of languages and linguistics on our campus in cooperation with WA that would provide hands on training to those students who are interested in choosing to enter Bible translation ministry. The school would further expose all of our students not only to the need for Bible translation but also to the many Bible translators who are serving the Lord in remote and difficult areas of India and neighboring countries as many of them will be coming to the campus for short-term refresher courses. Their lives and ministries are sure to inspire and motivate our student-body as a whole.

The School of Music and Worship that we launched two years ago is another example of providing opportunities not just for theoretical learning but practical, hands-on learning. NTC is the first affiliated/accredited school in India to develop a School of

Music and Worship. Now we are praying for and working to develop an ethno-musicology department that would further enhance hands-on training for our students.

Our students are taught and encouraged to give sacrificially to the field work. Specific fields are chosen where their offerings support pioneering missionaries. This creates ownership in the minds of the students and motivates them to not only pray for the particular field missionary, but also to give sacrificially. During every monthly fasting and prayer day -we suspend classes on the last Friday of every month and spend the whole day in fasting and prayer- every student gives specifically for the field missionaries that are chosen to be supported by the student community. This is in addition to the Sunday offerings and tithes that are given by the whole NTC community.

All the students are required to do practical ministry for a specified length of time under the supervision of an experienced field-worker. Duration of practical training varies depending on the length of their courses. We have found that this part of the training is very helpful in influencing the students in their choice of fields and types of ministry for themselves.

Reflections on Theological Education/Christian Leadership Training: Towards Solutions to the Problems.

Our own experiences in theological education/Christian leadership training and church-planting during the past two decades helped us to form the following principles that are now guiding us. We are by no means claiming that these principles are infallible or that these would completely eliminate all the problems identified and enumerated at the end of chapter I. But we do want to argue that if these principles are followed they

would help us to make significant progress in reducing many of the problems that the Church in India faces.

Principle #1: Theological Education/Christian Leadership Training Must Instill in the Ones We Train Complete Dependence on the Holy Spirit and His Gifts for Them to Be Transformed and to Be Effective in Their Ministries.

While some might say that this is obvious and therefore need not to be mentioned, I want to argue that unless we consciously and whole-heartedly depend on the grace, mercy and power of the Holy Spirit, we will not be able to make significant changes for good in our theological education/Christian leadership training nor will we be able to reach the remaining hundreds of ethnic groups with the gospel. We desperately need the transformation that comes only through the work of the Holy Spirit to have leaders who love the Lord, His Word and His Church and who will work with commitment and passion to transform individuals and communities.

After all, why was the Holy Spirit given to the Church in the first place? We must not forget that the promise of the Spirit by our Lord in Acts 1:8 is in the context of His disciples asking Him about the timing of His “restoring the kingdom to Israel.” While the disciples are anxious to know when they would begin to benefit from the privileges of being rulers in the Kingdom, Jesus’ concern is for the people in “the ends of the earth” who have never even heard about the Kingdom. The reply that the Lord gives to His disciples teaches us the unique role that the Holy Spirit must play in fulfilling the Great Commission. The primary purpose for the giving of the Holy Spirit, according to the Lord’s reply, is enabling the Church to witness “to the ends of the earth”.

On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Act 1:4-8 NIV)

Yet most of us, including so many who call themselves Pentecostals, have largely neglected the Holy Spirit except for using the triune formula in baptism and benediction. The Church in India, if she hopes to become a witness to the remaining nearly two thousand ethnic groups and one hundred and forty or more languages, must stop giving lip-service to the Holy Spirit and recognize that the third person in the Holy Trinity is given to us to help the Church to fulfill the Great Commission. We must recognize that He is Lord and allow the Holy Spirit full freedom in the Church, instead of trying to box Him in with our theology.

When we look at NTC graduates who are making significant impact in communities that they serve we find invariably that they are the ones who take the Holy Spirit and His gifts seriously. There are many examples that I can cite. One should suffice.

K.P. Philipose is a graduate of NTC who along with his wife, Dolly, have been serving as cross-cultural missionaries in the state of Arunachal Pradesh for nearly twenty years. When he graduated he was called to pastor a congregation in the capital city of Arunachal Pradesh, Itta Nagar, whose members were exclusively from the South Indian state of Kerala. Most of them were well-educated and well-to-do people who had come to Arunachal Pradesh to work for the government. Worship in the church was in

Malayalam, the native language of Kerala. The congregation hardly had any interest or concern for the native people of Arunachal Pradesh who were largely unreached by the gospel. Their culture and food-habits were so different from the Malayalee culture and food-habits. Except for a few who understood the mandate of Acts 1:8 and took it seriously most of the congregation looked down upon the native people as uncivilized barbarians and wanted to have nothing to do with them.

But Philipose was thoroughly influenced by the spirit of missions in NTC and knew that he was sent to Arunachal by the Holy Spirit not just to pastor a Malayalee congregation. Though several members of his traditional congregation strongly opposed his plans to preach the gospel to the natives, God gave him favor with enough members and they stood with him and encouraged him.

He and Dolly started to fast and pray for days at a time for the Lord to touch the tribal people of Arunachal who were under the bondage of witchcraft, alcohol and drugs. Eventually breakthrough came after almost ten years of their arrival in Arunachal. When it came it was like in the Book of Acts. God opened blind eyes and set people free from demonic bondages. Since 2002 Philipose has baptized over eight thousand people with his own hands. He and Dolly have now established forty-two congregations and have led people belonging to half a dozen different tribes to the Lord.

There are two things they have consciously done that resulted in the spectacular success of their ministry.

Total Dependence on the Grace and Power of the Holy Spirit

Philipose and Dolly have trained the people they have led to the Lord to fast and pray for days at a time and to expect the Holy Spirit to work through them. It is not uncommon to meet people in their congregations who have fasted forty days at a time several times. They themselves set the example by fasting and praying for seven days, twenty-one days, and forty days at a time every year. All-night prayer meetings are very common in the congregations they have pioneered. Fasting and prayer is the hallmark of their ministry. Philipose's and Dolly's dependence on the Holy Spirit for ministry is an example that ought to be emulated by all laborers in the Lord's vineyard.

Identification with the People He Is Trying to Reach

Many in the upper middle class congregation that called him as a pastor resisted his call to reach the natives of Arunachal Pradesh because of their ethno-centric attitude. In their opinion their Malayalee culture was superior to the culture of the Adi, Appathani, Nissi and other tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. But Philipose had learned in NTC that the love of Christ demands a disciple to love all people as Jesus loves them and that He had died to redeem people "from every tribe and language and people and nation." (Rev 5:9 NIV). So he decided to abandon the ethno-centrism and feelings of racial superiority with which he grew up and identify as much as he could with the different tribes that he was trying to reach.

He has told me that it was not easy for him, especially when it came to eating the food that was eaten by some of the tribal people. It is common for many of the tribals in

Arunachal to eat rats and different kinds of worms. Philipose has vividly described to me his first experience of a whole boiled rat with eyes, ears and tail being served to him and how difficult it was to eat it. But now he relishes that dish! No wonder people love him and respect him and follow him!

Those of us who are called for the ministry of theological education/Christian leadership training must never become tired of emphasizing that without the constant aid of the Holy Spirit all the training in the world will not do anyone any good. Dependence on the Holy Spirit must become an integral part of every Christian worker that we train, no matter what his or her particular call is.

Principle #2: Theological Education/Christian Leadership Training Must Be Done in Intimate Relationship with the Church; Bible Colleges and Seminaries Must Serve the Church.

Another major weakness of the prevalent model is the church-school dichotomy. While the seminary ought to be serving the Church often there is a tendency for the school to pursue an agenda independent of the Church. Words of the well-known Indian theological educator Saphir Athyal state the problem succinctly and clearly when he wrote, "The seminaries exist to serve the church, but they have become prodigal children doing their own thing. They are often out of touch with the needs of the church and society at large."⁴ Ordinary believers often find it difficult to identify with seminary

⁴ Saphir Athyal, "Missiological Core of Theological Education," *UBS Journal*, 1 no.2 (September 2003): 55.

graduates. Products of the seminary speak a language that is alien to most in the pew.⁵

This has not always been so even in the West. Writing about the Presbyterian Church and its seminaries in the US, Samuel G. Stevens wrote in the fifties:

In conclusion let us say again that the seminaries of the Presbyterian Church are not institutions apart. They are part and parcel of the very life of the Church. Theirs is not a “side of the road” existence, but they are drawn in the road as part of the throng. This is seen in their work with the Boards and agencies of the Church. It is seen in the cooperative planning in an effort to produce ministers for the Church.⁶

Can the same be said about most seminaries and Bible Colleges today?

Michael Griffiths, Professor of Mission at Regent College vehemently criticizes seminaries for teaching with the aim of producing scholars and choosing professors solely on academic standing without regard to ministry experience.⁷ Because of this emphasis on scholarship and not on ministry experience seminary graduates have more “library credibility” than “street credibility”.⁸ Peter O’Brien writes that in India “. . . almost unconsciously theological teachers have sought to make students like themselves rather than develop their gifts and ministry.”⁹ Teaching has become solely content-centered and thus abstract.

⁵ Yau-Man Siew, “Theological Education in Asia: an indigenous agenda for renewal,” in *With an Eye on the Future: Development and Mission in the 21st Century: Essays in honor of Ted Ward*, eds. Duane Elmer and Lois McKinney (Monrovia: MARC, 1996), 60.

⁶ Samuel G. Stevens, “The Seminary in the Life of the Church,” in *Ministers in Training: A Review of Field Work Procedures in Theological Education*, ed. J. Christy Wilson (Princeton: Princeton Theological Seminary, 1957), 95.

⁷ Quoted by Siew, “Theological Education in Asia”, 61 from Michael Griffiths, Theological education need not be irrelevant, *Vox Evangelica* 20, 7-19.

⁸ Siew, “Theological Education in Asia”, 61.

⁹ Peter O’Brien, “Innovation and Change in Indian Theological Education,” *Journal of Christian Education* 17 (October 1994): 31-32.

As McGavran wrote, our goal in training must not be to produce “static ministry for static Churches”.¹⁰ If our goal is to impact our society at large then the ones we train must be trained to serve the Church- to start new churches where there is none and to inspire the existing ones to grow and reach out to the people that are untouched by the Gospel. Fulfilling the Great Commission must be the passion of every person that completes theological training.

Unfortunately this is not true about many seminary graduates in India. Many Bible-believing Christians and congregations vehemently complain that seminary trained pastors do not preach with passion and are not true to the Gospel. One of the primary reasons for this sad state of affairs is that seminaries have become ‘islands’, insulated and isolated from realities that believers and congregations face. The only way this can be remedied is by linking theological education/Christian leadership training as closely as possible with congregational lives.

George Patterson describes an ideal relationship of the seminary and local churches as follows: “The theological institution must place itself neither over nor under the local churches, but in an intimately cooperative framework *with* them. Ideally, each local church would serve as a pastor training center, in collaboration with a resident or extension seminary.”¹¹ In other words both must work together for the desired goal. The two are not competing with one another; the two are members of the same team with the same goals. This is an extremely important point and we forget this to the peril of the Church. When training becomes isolated from the real needs of the Church ‘ivory tower’ mentality prevails and graduates become largely useless for the Kingdom.

¹⁰ Donald A. McGavran, *How Churches Grow* (New York: Friendship Press, 1970), 142.

¹¹ George Patterson, “Extension Education for Church Multiplication”, 188.

Bringing the Modality and Sodality together was our passion from the very beginning. As stated earlier, the Lord sovereignly led us to this path and guided us to make sure that the training we impart is not isolated from real reason for training-ministering to God's Church.

Principle #3: Spiritual Formation (Character Development/ Moral Formation) and Ministry Formation Must Not Be Sacrificed at the Altar of Theological Formation (or Intellectual Formation). All Three Are Equally Important.

If there ever is a complaint against theological education it is this: "theological seminaries are theological cemeteries!" In my opinion, those of us who are in theological education dismiss it outright to our peril. May the Lord help us to take this charge seriously and do everything we can to change this!

While this is not universally true in our experience in BSS/NTC/CEA, I cannot honestly say that it is not at all true. We have innumerable graduates who have gone out with the same fervor for the gospel, the Lord and the Church with which they came in for their training, and many even with more fervor. Sooraj Pal, who came to us as a brand new believer, all alone from an orthodox Hindu family, and who completed his bachelor's (B.Th.) and master's (B.D.) degrees with us and now serves as a faculty member, is just one example of those who discerned the wheat from the chaff, accepted what is good and rejected what is false and grew strong in his faith and commitment to the Lord and His Church. There are many others like Sooraj.

But then, I must sorrowfully admit that there are instances in which men and women have been adversely affected with the theological training we provided. I have counseled students who struggled with their faith as a result of what they had to study. I

have heard from several thinking students who raised questions like: “Why do I have to study this? This is so irrelevant for the ministry that I want to enter into.” This is the unfortunate result of affiliation and accreditation which forces us to teach subjects that are really not relevant or useful.¹² In the present condition of India an institution like NTC does not have a whole lot of options if it desires to serve the whole Church by pursuing excellence in academics as well as excellence in spiritual and ministry formation. Are we between a rock and a hard place?

The question that I wrestle with constantly is this. In NTC along with the pursuit of excellence in academics, we have strong emphasis on the authority of the Scripture, the uniqueness of Christ as the only way to the Father, missions, evangelism, reaching the unreached, praying for the lost and all the other essential elements for the proper development of committed, dedicated, and fervent leaders. But do the academic pursuit and the constant academic pressures that come along with it “choke”¹³ the other essentials?

In my observation, the general temptation in a theological community is to make knowledge the supreme. Unknowingly many in the theological communities succumb to the temptation of intellectual pride and bow at the altar of knowledge instead of keeping Jesus as the Lord, Master, and King. While knowledge and pursuit of excellence are very important these must never take the place of the Lord. If this ever happens we utterly fail. We must never come to the place where we forget that our duty is *not* just to fill the

¹² I wish and pray that the affiliation system that is in place for the Senate of Serampore would evolve with time and the Senate would grant freedom to seminaries/colleges to follow the system that is prevalent in the US where institutions have the freedom to set the syllabi (curricula) and choose the text-books provided they maintain a prescribed standards for faculty, library etc. I believe the Indian Church and our theological education system has grown to the point that it is time to break out of the old thinking.

¹³ Cf. Matthew 13:22.

minds of the trainees under our stewardship with *information*, but it is *also* to *mold* their *spirituality* and *character* and help them to acquire the necessary *skills* to fulfill their call as much as we possibly can. Spiritual/character formation and ministry formation are as equally important as theological formation in the successful training of leaders who will be useful for the Kingdom. Excellence in academics must never become an end in itself; it must remain a means to the end of training people to be committed and capable leaders.

Excellence in training (quality) and training large numbers of workers (quantity) are both equally important in meeting the challenges that the Church in India faces. Avoiding the extremes of totally ignoring academics or giving excessive importance to academics ought to be a top priority for all concerned.

Principle # 4: The Church in India Needs Multi-Dimensional Approach to Theological Education/Christian Leadership Training.

Traditional formal theological education¹⁴ alone will not meet the needs of the Indian Church. As it was graphically illustrated in the opening paragraph of this study no one person can reach India alone- *unless that person lives for 3,288 years preaching every single day of his or her life to one thousand different people and the population remains unchanging!*¹⁵ Only way we can ever fulfill the Great Commission in India and

¹⁴ By “traditional formal theological education” we mean training that is done in the context of a seminary or Bible College where the trainee spends a long period of time (usually three or four years). The primary focus of traditional formal theological education is imparting knowledge in a class-room context through lectures. A major criticism of this method of training is that it does not give adequate attention to character or moral formation and ministry formation. Concern has been rising that character building or moral formation needs to become a stronger part of theological training. See for example Richard John Neuhaus, ed., *Theological Education and Moral Formation*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992).

¹⁵ See footnote #1 in Chapter One.

plant churches among every ethnic groups of this great country is by multiplying laborers.¹⁶ Therefore we need to be creative in thinking of ways in which large numbers of quality workers with fervor and vigor can be trained. No one form of training is sufficient to produce all the workers that the Church in India needs. We need to utilize any and all forms of training that are available: formal, informal and non-formal.¹⁷

Donald McGavran, a missionary statesman who is thoroughly familiar with the Third World conditions of the Church and in particular that of India, long ago affirmed that one form of training will not meet the needs of a growing church in India. He identified at least three kinds of leaders with varying degrees of training that are essential in the context of the “young Church”.¹⁸ His point of view is that since India has millions of very highly educated people as well as millions of semi-literates and illiterates, Church also needs to have leaders of varied degrees of educational levels and training. Rural congregations as well as congregations in slum areas of cities consist of members who tend to be semi-literate or illiterate. Leaders to lead such congregations do not require higher levels of education or training. In most instances higher levels of education and training become impediments to effective ministry under such circumstances. Whereas urban congregations tend to have prosperous, highly educated members and such

¹⁶ Cf. Matthew 9:27-38.

¹⁷ These three forms overlap with each other in every training situation. Water-tight compartmentalization of these forms is impossible. Yet the following differentiations are helpful. Formal training is teacher and curriculum (syllabus) centered. It is class-room based with academic prerequisites and lead to degrees and diplomas. Transfer of knowledge takes place primarily through the lecture method. In non-formal training the dominant features are self-programmed study, trainees themselves helping one another in the context of small groups with a person to guide the learning process (rather than one person lecturing). The dominant features of informal training are trainees learning from observation of leader (s) and participation in community activities, a kind of “osmosis process”. See Victor B. Cole, *Training of the Ministry* (Bangalore: Theological Book Trust, 2001), 130-135.

¹⁸ McGavran, *How Churches Grow*, 139.

congregations would need pastors who are well educated. McGavran also argues for the importance of training lay people as leaders as they can serve as unpaid leaders and serve the Church in many different capacities.¹⁹ Indian scene has drastically changed since the days in which McGavran served as a missionary in India.²⁰ Now even many of the villages, particularly in Southern India, also have highly educated congregations. Still the point he made is valid.

In early 2000 David Bennett, a pastor and missions scholar was commissioned by a number of US foundations to study the Christian leadership training needs in India. Bennett was the ideal man to conduct such a study as he was very familiar with the condition of Indian Christian leadership training since he served as a professor in Union Biblical Seminary (UBS), a well-known Indian evangelical seminary, and had spent considerable time in India. One of the goals of the foundations that commissioned the study was to discover the most effective ways to train large numbers of leaders for the rapidly growing Church in India. Bennett took two years to complete his thorough study during which time he personally visited and interviewed hundreds of Indian Christian leaders. The study was completed in 2003 and is known as *The Indian Leadership Study*.²¹ It identified five levels of leadership that are necessary for the emerging Church in India. Bennett called these five levels as 'Type 1 to Type 5' leaders. In his opinion, Type 1 and Type 2 leaders can be trained through non-formal training, using short-term training sessions that will not conflict with their regular responsibilities as a farmer or merchant and without removing them from their environment for long periods of time.

¹⁹ McGavran, *How Churches Grow*, 139.

²⁰ McGavran served as a missionary in the present-day Chhattisgarh, a North Indian state.

²¹ Bennett, *The Indian Leadership Study*.

Type 3 leaders would need additional biblical and theological training as they will be responsible for supervising and directing several Type 1 and Type 2 leaders. As a result some formal training as well as ongoing continuous training²² will be desirable for this group. Type 4 and Type 5 leaders will certainly require advanced theological education as they will be leading training institutions and denominations.

While Bennett's classifications may strike some as simplistic, his study certainly deserves a closer look. Though primarily done for the benefit of US Christian foundations in helping their funding decisions, this study is very helpful for the Indian Church. Bennett is asking the Indian Christian leadership to think outside of the box to meet the challenges that the Church is facing in training its leaders. That, in my opinion, is a major contribution of his study for the Indian Church.

The study conducted by The Theological Education Fund of WCC also agrees that a single dimensional approach is not adequate to address the issue. James H. Burtness has written the following in the TEF study: “. . . the long-range commitment must be to a *multi-dimensional* (the word 'level' is not purposely used), *polychromatic approach to equipping the saints* for servant-hood, enabling the many members to function as one body, receiving the diverse gifts of the Spirit with gratitude, honoring various talents, training for many ministries.”²³

Thus the evangelical and liberal wings of the Church agree on this one thing: we need more than a 'cookie cutter' type of training. Different contexts demand different

²² One example of the ongoing, continuous training is the Strategic Advanced Leadership Training (SALT) that is provided by one of our satellite training centers in Bhopal. We also provide such training to all of the CEA pastors through seminars and regional conferences conducted regularly in the fields.

²³ James H. Burtness, *Learning in Context: The Search for Innovative Patterns in Theological Education* (Kent, England: New Life Press, 1973), 15. Emphasis added.

types of training. It is good to remember that the 1968 Hudson report had emphasized this same point.²⁴ So it is high time for the Church in India to recognize and put into practice multi-faceted training programs in theological education to produce the large numbers of workers that are urgently needed for the Indian Church. Every caring congregation needs to implement some form of conscious training program to equip the saints for the works of the ministry.

Principle #5: Seminaries and Bible Colleges Must Develop Training Programs That Are Inclusive.

In the process of developing multi-faceted training methods no segment of the Church must be ignored -educated and uneducated, literate and illiterate, men and women, laity and clergy, rural and urban, young and old- all have their roles in building up the Church in India.

In the traditional theological training primary emphasis and importance is given to training young people. Better than ninety percent of a new class in a traditional seminary would be new graduates (whether high school or college). A traditional seminary admits a 'mature candidate' only rarely. Is this healthy? In societies that respect age and experience the Church is missing out because the focus is only on the young.²⁵

What about the criteria for admission in theological institutions? When we look at the disciples of Jesus and a freshmen class in a seminary are there anything in common between the two groups? Have we so emphasized academics that we have left behind the

²⁴ See footnote #26 in Chapter One.

²⁵ This is especially true in India.

kind of people Jesus would call today to follow him? Peter and John were recognized to be “unschooled, ordinary men”.²⁶ Paul described the members of the Corinthian church in the following words:

Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are so that no one may boast before him.²⁷

To be more effective in our training should we not look at all segments of the society? The problem is that it will not be easy for the traditional theological training centers to accommodate such people. Many lay people are interested in studying God’s Word in depth. But they cannot leave their families and jobs and come and reside in a theological seminary campus for three or four years. Many believers that are full of zeal for the Lord like Peter and John are illiterate or semi-literate and will not pass the entrance examination for admission. They do not have transcripts that show an exemplary academic history. So we leave them out. As a result the Church loses out in the end.

It is gratifying to see that movements such as TEE²⁸ are filling this gap to a certain extent. Still we have a long way to go. I pray that TEE as it is growing and developing will not forget its roots and give academics undue importance. I also pray that more theological seminaries and Bible Colleges would take initiatives to provide opportunities for theological training to lay people.

²⁶ Acts 4:13.

²⁷ 1 Corinthians 1: 26 to 28 (NIV)

²⁸ Theological Education by Extension (TEE) was originally developed in Latin America to train large numbers of leaders for the rapidly expanding Church there. It was introduced in India in 1971. Soon it was organized under the name The Association for Theological Education by Extension (TAFTEE). Thousands of Christians have benefited from TAFTEE’s training programs. See Siga Arles, *Theological Education for the Mission of the Church in India* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1991), 270.

Our goal must be to train *all* of the Church for the ministry. As Protestants we affirm the priesthood of all believers. If we truly believe this truth then we must demonstrate it through our practice. We must recognize that ‘lay leadership’ is tremendously important for the Church.²⁹ McGavran identified his “third variety” of leaders as “the unpaid layman”.³⁰ When the church grows rapidly in a nation like India there will be no way to have adequate numbers of paid workers to serve all the needs of the Church. Therefore it is essential that large numbers of lay leaders are trained well to take over leadership roles in the Church.

This is what we are doing through NTC and its satellite training centers since our early days. We believe that this approach has yielded considerable fruit for the ministry. Take for example a young lady from Orissa, Jyoti, who joined the five month Discipleship course in NTC. Jyoti has studied only up to eighth class and would not have received admission in any of the traditional seminaries. But because of what the Lord had shown us through our initial experience we gladly admitted Jyoti.

After the completion of the course she went back to Orissa and married Pastor Shankar Kuldip, one of our colleagues. Jyoti has proven herself to be a very effective church planter and leader through her ministry. Though not academically trained and though she does not have a theological degree she has led scores of families to the Lord and has at times effectively pastored multiple congregations with her husband. Her husband also acknowledges that she is a better soul-winner than him!

Training Christian workers like Jyoti does not fit in with the accepted paradigm of seminaries and Bible Colleges. There is a tendency toward intellectual pride among us.

²⁹ McGavran, *How Churches Grow*, 140.

³⁰ McGavran, *How Churches Grow*, 139.

As a result some of us who hold theological degrees tend to look down upon people like Jyoti. Is that pleasing to our Master? While there must be room for those with advanced theological degrees my argument is that this needs to change.

All who are familiar with the Indian context know well that though it is one country politically, India is ethnically one of the most diverse places on the face of the earth. It is estimated by the Anthropological Survey of India that there are 4,693 ethnic groups in the country.³¹ While a large number of these ethnic groups still remain unreached by the gospel, the Church is present among a significant number. Yet the Indian Church is lagging behind in training indigenous leadership for these newly reached ethnic groups.

There are many challenges that make the training of leaders for these newly reached ethnic groups difficult. First of all, most of these ethnic groups are illiterate or, at best, semi-literate. Traditional theological education is oriented to training only the literate. Seminaries and Bible Colleges are not equipped to train the illiterate and semi-literate. This needs to change. As narrated earlier, we found from experience that some of the most effective church planters are illiterate and semi-literate people. We need to devise creative ways to train them and stand with them to make the indigenous congregations among the newly reached people groups strong.

The arguments that Francis Ingoli made in the 17th century as he was fighting the prevalent prejudice among the Roman Catholic leadership that prevented the training and ordination of indigenous priests and bishops are still valid in India to a certain extent and

³¹ Singh, *Anthropological Survey of India, 3 Vols.* While this authoritative work gives the number of *Jathi* (caste or people group) in India as 4,693, *Joshua project.net* lists only 2,533 people groups in India of which 2,223 are described as unreached. www.joshuaproject.net; information retrieved on July 5, 2010.

demand our attention.³² Though we have come a very long way from those days and today it is almost universally recognized that for the Church to be strong in any given community it must have well-trained indigenous leadership we are still not where we ought to be in the Indian church. As a south Indian working as a cross-cultural missionary in north India, I am saddened to see the slow development of indigenous leadership in the North Indian Church. Moreover, it is a sad fact that leadership development among the so-called Dalit Christians is still more behind.

Principle #6: Theological Training and Theological Literature in the Heart Languages Must Become a Top Priority, However Difficult the Task Might Be.

The language of theological education in India is largely English, while the heart-languages of the predominant majority of Christians are vernacular, not to mention the vast majority of the unreached peoples. Very little Christian theological literature exists even in a major language like Hindi. Except for a few languages, most vernacular languages of the country do not even have a good concordance or basic commentaries on the books of the Bible.

If the Church in India is to become truly indigenous we must give priority to theological education in the vernacular, a principle that Ziegenbalg and Carey understood long ago. But, as we found in Chapter III, even a giant like Carey mostly failed in his attempt to make the medium of instruction in Serampore College Bengali.

After almost two centuries conditions have not changed in India. In our own attempt to improve theological education in Hindi in NTC we are met with too many

³² See Chapter Two.

hurdles that are difficult to overcome and the temptation to give up is so overwhelming.³³ Very few bright young Christians are open to studying theology in a vernacular. While, in New Theological College, we are unable to admit all the applicants that apply for courses in English, we do not receive even a small number of applications for the Hindi medium courses. The reason is two-fold:

- 1) The Church in Hindi speaking area is still very weak and the potential pool of applicants is small.³⁴
- 2) Even young people who do not know even the basics of English aspire to study in English as it is considered “more prestigious”.

If conditions are like this even now, it is no wonder that vernacular theological education did not make significant progress as Carey and his colleagues dreamed it would. A major criticism the Church in India faces stems directly from this issue. As the language of the leaders of the Church still remains English, to a large extent, Christians are accused of being unpatriotic. This criticism is gradually becoming irrelevant as India is becoming more and more an English speaking country. Yet that criticism is still heard often as Bishop Pickett heard it in the 19th century.³⁵

³³ New Theological College is one of less than a handful of theological seminaries in the Serampore System that is attempting to offer theological education in Hindi, the national language of India. The story of other seminaries, such as, Allahabad Theological Seminary, is not much different from ours.

³⁴ Even in a state like Kerala where Christians are significant in number, only those young people who cannot make it in the English medium apply for Malayalam medium theological education. In my knowledge there is no Serampore affiliated Malayalam medium theological school.

³⁵ “It (English education) has tended to accentuate the division between Christians and non-Christians in matters in which religious principles are not involved. It has consequently . . . been used by opponents as a weapon of attack on Christianity as a denationalizing and divisive force.” Quoted by J. C. Ingleby, *Missionaries, Education and India*, 71.

Therefore we need to redouble our efforts to provide quality theological education/Christian leadership training in all vernacular languages to make the Indian Church truly indigenous and strong. It is true that English has become the heart-language for many in India. But hundreds of millions are still untouched by English education. If we are concerned about these millions, then we must make theological education as well as theological literature in the vernacular a top priority. This would take courageous leaders who are willing to think outside the box and change existing paradigms- not at all an easy task. If a great man like Carey had difficulty in accomplishing this, imagine how much more difficult it would be for us. The failure of Satyaniketan to live up to the great hopes with which it was launched shows us how challenging the task is³⁶. Yet, we forsake this task to the detriment of the health of the Indian Church.

Conclusion

The six principles that I have chosen above are not exhaustive. There are other important points that could have been chosen and included in the list. I purposely decided to make it as short as possible. From the study of the history of the Church and theological education in India and from my own personal experience during the past two decades I am convinced that these six principles are the bare essentials that must be given top priority to minimize the weaknesses that we see in the existing paradigm of theological education and Christian leadership training. I strongly believe that if Christian leaders and theological educators would give priority to these six principles we would see significant changes in the lives of those who we train. I believe that we will not only be able to have better quality training but also be able to train more workers for the Kingdom

³⁶ See Chapter One.

APPENDIX

OUR STORY: HOW IT ALL HAPPENED

Family Background

The history of BSS/NTC/CEA is very closely intertwined with our own personal story. Therefore it inevitably has to include quite a bit of our personal history.¹

My wife, Leelamma, and I were blessed to be born in devout Christian families in the South Indian state of Kerala. My parents, the late Mr. M.O. George Chavanikamannil and Mrs. Pennamma Chavanikamannil raised me up in the fear of the Lord from childhood. Leelamma's father, the late Rev. K. I. George, served as a pastor in the Indian Pentecostal Church for many years before he passed away in 1994 at the age of sixty-seven. Her mother, Mrs. Aleyamma George, another very godly person, is the only one of our parents who is still living.

Our families are part of what is commonly known as the “St. Thomas Christian” or “Syrian Christian”² community that claim that St. Thomas, the Apostle of our Lord Jesus, commonly known as doubting Thomas, baptized our forefathers.³ The historical accuracy of this commonly held conviction is open to debate. But many historians do agree that there was a Christian community in the South West tip of India dating back to at least early second century. Archeological findings have corroborated this long-held

¹ This story is told by Palolil V. Joseph under the title “Remapping Mission: A North Indian Mission Paradigm” in *Remapping Mission Discourse: A Festschrift in Honor of the Rev. George Kuruvila Chavanikamannil*, eds. Simon Samuel and P.V. Joseph (Dehra Dun: NTC-ISPCCK, 2008), 1-21.

² Also known as Nazrāni Christian meaning the followers of Jesus the Nazarene.

³ Richards, *The Indian Christians of St. Thomas*, 2.

belief.⁴ Waves of immigration from the Christian communities of Syria to South India in the early Christian centuries are also well documented.⁵

Mar Thoma Church

My wife, Leelamma, was raised in a godly Mar Thoma family⁶. A brief narration of the history of the Mar Thoma Church is relevant to this thesis. The Mar Thoma Church is the result of a reformation of the parent Syrian Orthodox Church that took place in 19th century.⁷ Palakunnath Abraham Malpan, a devout priest in the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church was greatly influenced by the Holy Bible recently translated and made available in Malayalam, our mother tongue.⁸ Though the St. Thomas Christians (Syrian Christians) of Kerala had a very long history dating back to first century (or at least to the second or third century) there never was the Word of God in the language of the people.⁹

⁴ Richards, *The Indian Christians of St. Thomas*, 11.

⁵ George, *Christianity in India*, 86-87; T. Paul Verghese, "The Ancient Syrian Church of India: a Contemporary Picture," *The Ecumenical Review* XXII, no. 3 (April 1961): 281-286.

⁶ "Mar Thoma" is the Syriac form of Saint Thomas. The reformed Church that broke away from the Syrian Orthodox Church took the name "Malankara Mar Thoma Sabha", "sabha" being the Malayalam word for "Church".

⁷ Thomas John Philip Nalloor, *Palakunnathu Abraham Malpan: Life story of Palakunnathu Abraham Malpan (1796-1845): Leader of the Reformation* (Kuriannor, Kerala: Nalloor Publications, 2006).

⁸ Nalloor, *Palakunnathu Abraham Malpan*, 9.

⁹ Richards, *The Indian Christians of St. Thomas*, 19-20. It was Claudius Buchanan, a chaplain of the East India Company and Vice-Provost of Fort William College, Calcutta, who visited Travancore in 1806-07 and took the initiative to become familiar with the St. Thomas Christians that brought the attention of Protestant missionaries upon this ancient Christian community. His book *Christian Researches in Asia* motivated CMS missionaries to come to Travancore. Buchanan encouraged the translation of the Word of God into Malayalam. The then ruling Bishop ('Metran'), Mar Dionysius, gladly accepted Buchanan's suggestion to have the Bible translated into Malayalam. At that time only the Gospel of Matthew was translated into Malayalam and that too was available only in MSS form. Through Buchanan's initiative and strong support from the Metran translation from Syriac began and the four Gospels were printed in Malayalam in 1811. The complete Malayalam Bible was first published in 1841. Though this translation was imperfect in many ways, the Word of God being available in the language of the people became instrumental in the reformation of the Syrian Church. Later Benjamin Bailey translated the Bible from the

The Church existed primarily through the liturgy which was in Syriac, the classical language of Edessa, and a close cousin of Aramaic, the mother tongue of Jesus.¹⁰

“The translation was, for its time, a wonderful thing, the work of the Syrian clergy themselves; but the book produced was a big quarto volume, the language was unidiomatic, and the type very clumsy.”¹¹ Most of the translation work was done by an Orthodox priest (“Kattanar”) who had the title of Ramban (“Monk”). His name was Philippos.¹² Buchanan took such serious interest in the project that he personally carried the manuscript to Bombay accompanied by a few Kattanars to supervise the work, and made sure it was printed with the best quality that was available there.¹³

In spite of all the deficiencies of the translation and printing, (the book containing the four Gospels weighed 3 lbs. and 2 oz. or about 1.5 kg) when the Word of God became available in the “heart language” of the people, it caused a revival among the Syrian Christians.¹⁴ Eventually this led to a reformation of the Church and the birth of a missionary movement.¹⁵ The Church that existed for nearly eighteen hundred years with

original languages and then the renowned Indologist, Herman Gundert, who mastered Malayalam as no other European, further improved the Malayalam translation.

¹⁰ Richards, *The Indian Christians of St. Thomas*, 20.

¹¹ Richards, *The Indian Christians of St. Thomas*, 25.

¹² Richards, *The Indian Christians of St. Thomas*, 102.

¹³ Richards, *The Indian Christians of St. Thomas*, 102.

¹⁴ This is the Bible to which Henry Martin refers in his journal under the date 22nd February 1810. He wrote: “At the ‘Courier Press I saw the Malayalam New Testament in print as far as the 11th of John.” Quoted by W. J. Richards, *The Indian Christians of St. Thomas*, 103. According to Richards, as of 1909, this was the only Bible translation that was made by Indian Christians alone without European supervision. Richards has given a photograph of John 3:16 on page 104 of his book.

¹⁵ W. J. Richards, *The Indian Christians of St. Thomas*, 30. Richards describes Abraham Malpan, the leader of the Reformations as: “the Wyclif (sic) of the Syrian Church in Malabar.”

no concern at all for any other people group finally began to wake up to its missionary responsibility when the Word of God was read and preached.¹⁶

The condition of the Syrian Church before the Word of God became available to the common people in their heart-language is graphically described by W. J. Richards in his 1908 book in the following words:

The Syrian Church had paid a very high price for Hindu toleration. She gave up the power to witness for her Lord, she gathered not with Him, and so she barely lived as a caste among the castes; not as a Christian Church-a lamp set on a lamp-stand, but as a light hidden under a bushel- salt that had lost its saltiness (sic). The Jacobite Syrians, to whom the missionaries came, had indeed passed by the heathen on the other side.¹⁷

This historical truth points to a very important missiological principle that must never be forgotten: making the Word of God available in the “heart language” of the people needs to be the top priority in any missionary endeavor. This principle might be thought of as self-evident in the aftermath of the work of Ziegenbalg, Carey and other Protestant missionaries who gave supreme importance to translating Scripture into indigenous languages. But when we realize that there are still more than one hundred and forty “heart languages” in India without even portions of Scripture translated into them, this principle needs to be emphasized again.

Leelamma grew up in a parish where the gospel and the missionary enterprise were thoroughly emphasized. When she was young, one of her first cousins, Mr. K.V. Abraham, received a call for missions to Nepal and became one of the first missionaries

¹⁶ Nalloor, *Palakunnathu Abraham Malpan*, 9. It is worth noting that this was one of the goals the Church Missionary Society when it sent its first missionaries to work with the Syrian Christians in 1816. The first CMS missionaries to Travancore, Thomas Norton, Benjamin Bailey, Joseph Fenn and Henry Baker, were expressly told not to “proselytize” the St. Thomas Christians, but rather to bring about reformation among them with the goal of producing “efficient missionaries for surrounding Mohammedan and heathen countries.” See W. J. Richards, *The Indian Christians of St. Thomas*, 22.

¹⁷ Nalloor, *Palakunnathu Abraham Malpan*, 31.

from our village to go to Nepal. Along with him several of his class-mates from the same parish responded to the call for missions. Thus from childhood she heard the call to missions and saw people responding to that call.

There was a spirit of revival in our part of Kerala in those days. The Mar Thoma Church was responsible for several Gospel Conventions in our area. It was common for us to attend these Conventions and hear the gospel preached by well known preachers. Leelamma's parents hosted many of these preachers and they all had a positive influence on her.

When she was fourteen years old her parents left the Mar Thoma Church and became members in the Indian Pentecostal Church (IPC). Pastor K.E. Abraham, the founder of the IPC was a very charismatic and powerful preacher of the gospel and under his very capable leadership the IPC was rapidly growing in those days primarily by winning converts from the Orthodox, Mar Thoma and CMS (CSI) churches.¹⁸ Missions was even more emphasized in IPC congregations.

Another important factor that molded her spiritual life early on was a small Women's Bible Study group that met in a temporary shed that was adjacent to her home. This shed was a center for spiritual activities. Every week a venerable man of God, who happened to be one of my uncles, Mr. C. C. Chacko, would hold a Bible Study for women in this temporary building. Mr. Chacko had resigned his respected government job to preach the gospel full-time at a time when very few from our village had enough education even to obtain a good government job. As a little girl she would attend these Bible studies with her grandmother. Though as a child she did not enjoy attending these

¹⁸ See <http://www.ipcgeneralcouncil.org/history>.

adult Bible study classes; but now, looking back, she is glad that she was “forced” to attend them by her grandmother.

Leelamma had accepted Jesus as her lord and Savior at the age of ten. She was very active in her local churches, both in the Mar Thoma congregation and later in the IPC congregation. She always stood first in her Sunday school class examinations. She memorized vast portions of the Bible as a child and is still able to recite a number of chapters. As she was going through this training process she had no clue that the Lord was preparing her to serve Him in north India decades later.

Eastern and Western Traditions

While my future life-partner was being prepared for a missionary career by the Mar Thoma Church and later by the Indian Pentecostal Church, I too had a very blessed time of preparation. I benefited from both the best of the Eastern traditions and the Western traditions.

My mother was raised in the Syrian Orthodox Jacobite Church. When I was a small boy my maternal grandmother was an active member of the Syrian Orthodox Jacobite congregation in a place called Kanam, in Kerala. The priest who was in charge of this congregation was an uncle of my mother. As I spent considerable time with my maternal grandmother in my childhood (my paternal grandmother had passed away before I was born) I was blessed with the privilege of worshipping the Lord with her often. Her devotion to the Lord and strict discipline in following the traditions of the Orthodox Church, such as waking up and praying every three hours or so all through the

night, impacted me. I was fascinated by the colorfulness of the Orthodox worship; the colorful priestly garments, candles, incense, and the rituals were all fascinating to me.

On my father's side, our family was very active in the Anglican Church. There were a number of prominent pastors in our family and I was brought up to be a proud member of the CMS church (Anglican Church was known as CMS). These congregations were started by the Church Missionary Society missionaries who came to India from the United Kingdom. Later the name was changed to Church of South India-CSI- when Anglicans and several other Protestant denominations merged to form the first truly ecumenical Protestant church in the world on September 27, 1947.¹⁹

My parents- especially my mother- were strict disciplinarians and made sure that I never missed a single Sunday school class or church service. I too, like Leelamma, often stood first in my Sunday school classes and memorized quite a lot of Scripture. Attending the Gospel Conventions was a habit of my family also. All the Christians in our village would attend gospel meetings irrespective of the denomination of the organizers or of the preachers. We had no difficulty for walking miles to attend such meetings. We did not have flashlights to help us walk in the dark. We made torches with dry coconut leaves and would walk miles in its light! I still cherish fond memories of those Gospel meetings. These Gospel meetings helped me early on to be conscious of walking with the Lord and leading a righteous life. Yet I had no personal relationship with the Lord Jesus.

When I was quite young two members of our family, an uncle and a cousin, joined the Indian Pentecostal Church. That caused a lot of commotion within our family for two reasons. One, most of our family members were loyal CSI members; secondly, in

¹⁹ George, *Church of South India: Life in Union (1947-1997)* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1999). See M K. Kuriakose, *History of Christianity in India: Source Materials* (Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1982), 317-319 for the Manifesto and the names of the thirty-one Indians and two missionaries involved.

those days most of the people who joined the Pentecostal churches belonged to the so-called “low caste” and it was considered “shameful” to belong to a group in which most members came from such a background. My uncle, Mr. C.C. George (who later became the first Pentecostal pastor from our family) and cousin, Mr. C.K. Oommen (who was the first University graduate in my immediate family) saw through the unbiblical nature of such cultural evils and were able to overcome these, at least to a limited extent. So they had no difficulty worshipping the Lord with the so-called “low-caste” Christians and loving them as brothers and sisters in the Lord.

When I was thirteen years old my cousin, Mr. C. K. Oommen, took me to a Pentecostal meeting that was organized by my uncle, Pastor C. C. George, near his house. That meeting is still etched in my memory. I am not quite sure what happened to me in that meeting. I do not remember who the preacher was. But I do remember being overpowered by a sense of sin and guilt while the Word of God was preached. I was sobbing all through the preaching of the Word and during the altar call that followed. Though my cousin encouraged me to go forward when the altar call was given, I did not go forward. Maybe it was the fear of the “shame” of being associated with the so-called “low caste” people that kept me from going forward. Anyhow, I did write that date – 11-11-1961- in my Bible. I know something happened to me on that day; yet I am not quite sure what it is. I think I had an encounter with Jesus like never before. Was I born again on that day? I am not sure.

The Lord's Hand of Protection

Even though I was not walking with the Lord, the hand of the Lord was upon me. Several instances of the Lord's special care and protection stand out in my memory.

It was our custom for children to visit and spend days with close families during summer holidays. I particularly liked to visit a set a cousins who lived near a beautiful river. Since they were born and brought up near a river they all knew how to swim. I could not swim and wanted to learn how to swim.

I was determined to learn how to swim during one of those visits. My cousins, being my own age or younger, did not know how to teach me to swim. So whenever I would ask them they would give me one excuse or another. One day I insisted that they take me to the deepest part of the river! They, knowing that I cannot handle deep waters, pointed to one direction and told me that deep waters were in that direction. Then they went swimming. When they left I got cold feet and decided that I would go to shallow waters and went off to the direction where the deep waters really were! Before I knew I was drowning! By the time my cousins saw what was happening I had gone down to the deepest waters. They tried to rescue me and could not. Only thing they could do was cry aloud and call for help!

As I was going down the third time God sent a man with a boat. He jumped into the water after me and rescued me. If he were two minutes late I would have died. God's providential hand was upon me even though I did not recognize that.

University Days

After I completed my tenth class my brother took me to the city of Ernakulam to enroll in Pre-degree course in Sacred Heart College, Thevara, a Roman Catholic college under the University of Kerala. My brother was a school teacher in those days and he taught in the school associated with Sacred Heart College. I got admission in the chemistry-physics-mathematics stream of Pre-degree. At the end of the two year course I barely passed the final examinations as I did not at all enjoy these subjects. So I decided to switch my major to philosophy as I had by then developed a desire to go to law school after my bachelor's degree and thought that philosophy and logic would help me to become a good lawyer. My ambition was to become a lawyer and pursue a career in politics as by then I had developed a keen interest in politics.

I got admission in Maharaja's College in Ernakulam for B A in philosophy. I really enjoyed the study of philosophy, logic, and psychology and did excel in my studies. At the same time I was very active in politics; I worked whole-heartedly for a student political party known as Kerala Students' Union (KSU) which was the student wing of the Indian National Congress, the party of Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, which at that time was being led by Mrs. Indira Gandhi.

Protected by the Lord Yet Again

I experienced another instance of God's gracious protection while I was an activist with KSU. During those days student unions, both on the right and the left, often indulged in violent protests. Destruction of public property was common. In my foolishness I too often took part in such activities. In 1965 or 66 there was a major

“strike” called by KSU, the student union in which I was an activist. During the strike students pelted stones at buses and police vehicles and the police retaliated by caning the protestors. One of my acquaintances was beaten by the police and he was bleeding profusely. Instead of getting medical attention for the student who is injured we hoisted him on our shoulders and took out another procession! (Looking back I realize that our activities were so foolish!) I was a leader in this procession and the police took note of it.

The next day police came looking for me! In those days if the police caught you there would not be any escape without getting really thrashed up. And I was physically very frail. It is possible that such thrashing could result in permanent injuries or even death. It was not uncommon for protestors to die in police custody.

Unaware that the police were looking for me I was sound asleep in the veranda of my brother's house after spending many hours in the student rally. There was a curtain-like thing made of bamboo that shielded the bed from sunlight; otherwise the veranda was open.

The police came to our neighbor and asked where I would be. Without knowing the reason they told them that I was home. So they came home looking for me. If they had stepped into the veranda they would have found me sleeping. They asked the young lady who helped us with house-work where I was. Sensing something might be wrong she told them that I was not home! Without any further questions they turned back! Looking back now I know that the Lord in His mercy blinded their eyes; otherwise it would have been so easy for them to see me. And if I was taken into custody who knows what would have happened to me!

Immediately my brother sent me away to my parents place for several weeks until all the investigations were over and it was safe for me to return. That was the last time I took part in any violent, destructive protests. I learned my lesson quickly.

My brother, his family and I were members of the Immanuel CSI congregation in Ernakulam. We attended worship services faithfully. Though I was not quite sure about my personal relationship with Christ I was proud of my Christian heritage. I was the only Protestant student in my class; most of my classmates were Hindus, with the exception of three or four who were Roman Catholics. All of my teachers were also Hindus. Our senior most professor and the head of Philosophy department was a devout, “high caste” Hindu. He would often find opportunity to subtly make fun of Christianity during his lectures. Though I felt hurt I could not speak up as I knew very little of my own faith.

Personal Encounter with Jesus

During my second year of B A studies, in 1967, a family friend invited my brother, his wife and I to attend a Bible Study in the Indian Pentecostal Church. It was right after the ‘Six Day War’ (June 5-10, 1967). The Bible study was led by Pastor P.M. Philip, a well-known Pentecostal preacher in Kerala.²⁰ He used the Six Day War as the background for the study. This immediately ignited interest in me as I was very deeply involved in politics. So I kept going back to the Bible study day after day. Pastor Philip masterfully weaved the contemporary world politics into his teaching of the Bible and kept my attention. He convincingly (in my opinion) showed how the Bible foretold thousands of years ago the events that were taking place right in front of our eyes. He

²⁰ P.M. Philip, *My Pilgrimage with Christ* (Kottayam, Kerala: Royal Calling Books, 1999). This book is in Malayalam and the title in Malayalam is *Kristuvil Ente Yatra*. See also <http://shalombiblecollege.org/READ%20MORE.html>

used every opportunity to point out the uniqueness of Jesus from Bible prophecy. He would often repeat this one sentence: “His (Jesus’) biography was written centuries before He was born”.

I never knew that such things were in the Bible even though I read the Bible from childhood and memorized considerable portions of the Scripture. At first my interest in Pastor Philip’s teaching was aroused with the hope that I could get some points from him to answer my Professor who made fun of my ancestral faith. But, as days went by, I was so impressed with the uniqueness of Christ that I wanted to know more. I was amazed by the Bible prophecies. At the end of the two weeks study I was eager to surrender my life fully to the lordship of Christ. The Holy Spirit used my interest in politics and world events to lead me to the feet of Jesus who is the Lord of all politics and politicians. Moreover I felt a strong call to preach this Christ. During one of the altar calls in the Bible study I went forward and surrendered my life to Jesus and publicly declared my decision to preach the Gospel. My brother and his wife also made decisions to follow Jesus, along with several other people. There was great enthusiasm in that small congregation.

The pastor of that small congregation, Pastor M.V. Thomas, was very prompt to do the follow-up with us. He visited us frequently and encouraged us to stay committed to the decisions that we took. He encouraged me to be a witness to the gospel without any delay. I was used to public speaking due to my active participation in politics. So it was not at all difficult for me to preach the gospel (what I knew) in street corners of the city of Ernakulam as Pastor Thomas wanted me to do.

On October 8, 1967 the three of us (my brother, his wife and I) were baptized in a nearby canal by Pastor C.C. George, our uncle, in whose place I experienced the special touch of the Holy Spirit almost six years earlier.

Call to North India

In January 1968 I attended the famous Kumbanad Convention, the largest gathering of Pentecostals in Kerala. In one of the day meetings someone from north India preached in Hindi (translated into Malayalam) about the need for missionaries in north India. His message penetrated my heart and I committed my life to become a missionary to north India. I was nineteen then and did not really know what I was doing! But the Lord knew and His grace enabled me to fulfill that commitment though it took almost two decades.

Having grown up in a very sheltered Christian environment I had no idea about the desperate need for the gospel in north India. I rarely heard any missionary messages preached. I was totally unaware of the hundreds of unreached people groups of north India and about the scores of languages that still existed without Scripture. I am sad to say that conditions have not drastically changed for most Christians in Kerala even today, though there is some progress. Even the ones who really love the Lord and walk with Him do not know of the true condition of the Church in north India.

The Church in south India is capable of doing much more for the evangelization of north India. More effective communication of the needs in the north is essential to challenge the believers in the south.

Door Opens to the United States and Marriage

After completing her degree in economics and history from Thiruvalla Mar Thoma College (University of Kerala), Leela went to Nepal to teach in a school in Kathmandu. (Her cousin, Mr. K.A. Abraham, who was serving as a missionary in Nepal, helped her to procure a job there). I continued my studies for a master's degree in English (going back to Sacred Heart College) and at the same time remained very active in ministry as an itinerant evangelist. Upon completion of my studies I got a job teaching English in Wisdom College, Ernakulam. While teaching I remained active in a preaching ministry that opened many doors for me in a wide area of my home state. God in His abundant mercy used me to lead a number of people to Him through my preaching. Looking back I still marvel what I preached as I had no training whatsoever! Yet God was pleased to use me and it was (and is) His grace alone that used (uses) an inadequate vessel like me for His glory.

While teaching in Nepal, in the fall of 1972, God opened a door for Leela to enroll in North Central Bible College, Minneapolis, Minnesota. God provided her the necessary visa to enter the US and start her studies. Since we were planning to get married soon and I wanted to receive theological training, the idea came: "Why not get married in the US?" Once again God opened the right doors at the right time and I too ended up in Minneapolis on August 6, 1973 and Leela and I got married on September 1, 1973.

Lessons in Life of Faith

Early on in married life the Lord taught us that He is our provider and that we can fully trust Him to take care of us. The Lord used so many unexpected sources to provide for our needs. One incident remains vivid as if it happened yesterday.

There came a time when we had no money at all. In fact we had only a quarter with us! We decided that we would make the most of it and walked to a nearby Dairy Queen to purchase ice-cream. We walked by the Elliot Park in Minneapolis. In those days many alcoholics frequented that park. So we were very cautious in walking by there.

As we walked by, someone came opposite to us. Not paying much attention and deeply immersed in each other, we moved closer to the right side of the foot-path, away from the park, to give space for the stranger to pass us. When he came close to us, all on a sudden he stepped right in front of me and extended his right hand to me! Without even thinking I reciprocated. He put something in my hand and as quickly as he came he walked past us without saying one word! By the time I realized that he had placed in my hand twenty dollars I turned around to say “thank you” to the stranger; he was gone! It could very well be that he stepped into the park from the sidewalk as he was walking on the side closer to the park. There were many bushes, five to six feet tall, next to the sidewalk, almost like a fence between the park and the sidewalk. He could very well have disappeared through those bushes. But for us he was an angel that the Lord sent with \$20 to teach us a very important lesson in faith. Much later in our pilgrimage of faith in serving the Lord in north India, the Lord sent a lady from north-eastern Georgia that we had never met, with \$200,000 at a very crucial time in our lives. (More on this later). The

\$20 in 1973 was just as big for us in teaching us to trust the Lord as the \$200,000 in 1986!

Fuller Theological Seminary and World Vision

We lived in Minnesota for only one year. God's hand was definitely upon us and He directed our steps in such a way that we moved to Pasadena, California in August 1974 and I enrolled in Fuller Theological Seminary.²¹ Leela, by now carrying our first child, decided that she would not continue her studies. Times were very tough for us; but at the same time those were very joyous days as well. God met all of our needs in miraculous ways. We will never be able to forget Pastor Maurice Tolle and the Pasadena Foursquare Church and their gracious help to us. We were allowed to live in the old parsonage of the church in exchange for cleaning the church and teaching a Sunday School class. Though the house was old and dilapidated, it was a mansion for us! That is the first home that both our sons knew.

Finny, our first-born, came along in February 1975 and Renny followed rather quickly in June 1976. We lived in the Pasadena Foursquare Church parsonage from late 1974 till December 1979. Leela worked in Bank of America and supported my studies. I graduated with my M.Div degree in June 1977 and right away enrolled in a Ph.D. program in New Testament under the mentorship of Dr. Daniel Fuller. I also started working for World Vision in the same year.

²¹ Time and space do not permit me to narrate what we still consider miracles that the Lord did for us in making our move to California possible. One of the agents that the Lord used to perform a major miracle was an officer with the Immigration and Naturalization Services of the US government, Mr. Mark Stauffer.

Leela and I always kept the dream of going back to serve the Lord in north India alive in our hearts. We kept talking about it to whoever that would listen to us. There were many skeptics who did not take us seriously. At the same time there were many who encouraged us to keep the dream alive.

The late Dr. Donald A. McGavran (1897-1990), told me many times in those days: “George, it is time to go back to India and train your people.” He thought that we should go to Andhra Pradesh, a south Indian state, as there was significant church growth happening there. But we knew that our call was to north India, though most of north India in those days was largely unresponsive to the Gospel, compared to what was happening in Andhra Pradesh and other parts of India where Church was growing fast. Yet his words were encouraging to me.

Obedying the Call to North India

Finally, in 1984, we were able to travel to India as a family. Both Leela and I could say, along with Jacob of old, that we crossed the ocean to the West all alone and empty-handed, but were coming back with two sons and many possessions (Genesis 32:10).

After visiting our families in South India we took time to travel in north India. I had never been to north India before even though the Lord had called me to the north way back in 1967. During our travel the Lord spoke to us very clearly that it was time to obey Him and fulfill His call upon our lives.

When we returned in January 1985 I submitted my resignation to World Vision. At that time I was serving as the manager of the telecommunications department of

World Vision, USA. My immediate boss, Mr. Steve Woodworth, asked me to serve for a few more months, until my replacement can be trained to take over. After further discussion and thought we decided that I would serve till January 15, 1986.

As January 1986 got closer my anxiety level steadily grew. All kinds of questions and doubts began to plague me. "Is this really the Lord or is it my own doing?" "How will I ever find enough resources to build a training center in north India?" "How will we send our two sons to good schools?"

"Jehovah Jireh"

I had become a part of Christian Evangelistic Assemblies/Grace International (CEA) and had received ordination in October 1984. The annual convention of CEA in 1985 was in Roseburg, Oregon. I attended that convention with all these questions in my mind. I was sincerely praying to the Lord to speak to me in a special way and direct my steps.

During one evening service all of us experienced a special presence of the Lord in the meeting. When an altar call was given by the preacher many of us went forward and were praying at the altar, including me. I was pouring my heart out to the Lord with tears, pleading with Him for an assurance that it was His plan that I was following. As I was kneeling at the altar and praying someone came and laid hands on my shoulders and prayed with me for a short while and at the end leaned over to my ear and gently said: "Jehovah Jireh"! Though the voice was soft and gentle it thundered in my soul. An overwhelming peace and assurance enveloped me! It was a woman's voice. I thought that it must be someone who knew me and my situation. I wanted to make sure and so turned

around to see who it was. It was a lady I did not recognize. Later I found out that she was a pastor's wife from Indiana who did not know who I was. When I asked her why she came to me and prayed with me and gave me that promise, her reply was that she was obeying the Lord! I knew that the Lord had spoken to me personally as I was asking him to do. I went home with a peace and assurance that what my wife and I were doing was indeed the will of the Lord.

Steps of Faith

On January 16, 1986 I was off to India. Because of the age of our children and their schooling situation we had decided that Leela would continue to work for a few more years and remain in the US and that I would commute back and forth.

Once we made the decision in early 1985 to obey the call of God on our lives, we had started praying a prayer almost constantly: "Lord, lead us to the exact place you want us to be in north India." As both of us are south Indians we hardly knew north India. Leela had worked for almost three years in Nepal and had traveled some in north India. I had never been to north India until our travels there in early 1985. We knew that there are deep cultural and linguistic differences between Kerala, where we grew up and the north. We also knew that in many parts of north India there is deep-rooted animosity toward the Christian faith and ministry. So we wanted to make sure that we were going where the Lord really wanted us to go. That's why we started praying that particular prayer.

At the same time, though we were praying: "Lord lead us to the *exact* place you want us to be in north India", we had no idea that the Lord was going to answer our prayer precisely as we prayed. A real surprise was waiting for us in answer to this prayer!

I travelled fairly extensively in north India. During a good bit of the travel my nephew, Rev. George C. Kuruvilla, affectionately called “Babu”, accompanied me as he is fluent in Hindi and also well-versed in the culture of the “Hindi-belt” area. Wherever we went we would try to meet with Christian leaders and share the vision that the Lord had given us to train Indian Christian workers for the Kingdom. In the process we received many suggestions from well-meaning leaders as to the ideal location for such a training center.

In the course of our travel we met a great man of God, Mr. Ray Eicher, the then director of Operation Mobilizations (OM) in Ghorakpur, one of the cities in Uttar Pradesh, very close to the border of Nepal. After hearing our story he highly recommended that we visit Dehra Dun before we finalize our plans. At that time Dehra Dun was not an option that we were considering as we knew Doon Bible College, one of the oldest Bible Colleges in north India, was already there. Our thinking was that it might be wiser to go where there was no training institution existing. But Mr. Eicher persuaded us to go.

We directly went to Doon Bible College (DBC) as the Principal, Mr. Jacob Chacko, was Babu’s teacher. He warmly welcomed us. When we shared our vision with him and other leaders in DBC they enthusiastically encouraged us to be in Dehra Dun. We considered their enthusiastic welcome and support a sign from the Lord that Dehra Dun might be the place that He has chosen for us.

Mr. Jacob Chacko was gracious to drive us around and show us the city and introduce us to several influential people. In course of time we met and talked to a number of real estate agents in our search for a suitable piece of land. We had decided

that we needed five acres of land to build the training center. We were told that an acre of land outside the city limits would cost a minimum of one hundred thousand Indian Rupees (approximately US \$10,000). So to acquire five acres we would need a minimum of five hundred thousand Rupees (US \$50,000).

We organized a Board of Directors with seven members and started the process to register a non-profit organization with the government. Rev. C. George, then Asian Director of Christ Group Ministries with World Literature Crusade consented to serve as the Chairman of the Board. The organization was named Bharat Susamachar Samiti, a rough translation of Good News for India, the name that we had chosen for the supporting ministry in the US.

After setting the process of registration in motion I came back to the US in April 1986 to raise funds to purchase the land. We had already launched Good News for India as a chartered ministry of Christian Evangelistic Assemblies Inc., (Grace International) so that we could issue tax-deductible receipts to the donors.

I began to knock on doors of pastors and churches. I would narrate our God-given vision to train Indian national Christians as cross-cultural missionaries to reach the hundreds of unreached people groups, primarily in north India. In spite of many who would not even give me a hearing, God kept opening just the right number of doors to keep me going. It was a really challenging time for my faith and enthusiasm. Yet the promise that the Lord gave- “Jehovah Jireh”- in October 1985 through that pastor’s wife kept coming back to my memory.

June 1986 was a very critical month in our faith venture. First, the Lord protected the life of my dear wife and friend, Leelamma, from death.

One night I had a strange nightmare. In that nightmare we were visiting some friends. There was a pool in the backyard of the house and children were playing in it. Then I noticed that my wife was standing on the diving-board and getting ready to jump into the pool. Instinctively I knew that there was not enough water in the pool for her to dive into it. So I rushed out to stop her. Before I could she had already jumped into the pool. And she was not coming up! So I jumped into the pool to rescue her. When I lifted her up from the water she was already dead! It was really strange in that though I just lifted her out of water she was not at all wet. On her forehead there was a cut: about an inch or so long and not so deep. With that scene I woke up terrified. I checked on my wife who was sleeping next to me; she was fine. After praying for a while I went back to sleep. When I woke up I had forgotten the nightmare.

In the morning she got ready to go to work and discovered that there was not enough gasoline in her car. As she did not like to pump gas I followed her to the nearest gas station and filled her car. She drove off to Pasadena and I returned home. As I opened our garage door I heard the phone ringing; just then I remembered the nightmare! When I answered the phone it was a California highway patrol officer. He calmly informed me that my wife was in an accident and that I should get there as soon as possible. Immediately I drove to the location. Even before I got to the accident site I could see fire engines, police cars and ambulances. Before I panicked I noticed that Leela was standing next to an officer. The fact that she was standing relaxed me a bit. When I walked up to her I could not believe my eyes: she had the exact cut on her forehead that I saw in my nightmare!

The investigating CHP officer told me that it is a real miracle that she was not seriously hurt. The car was totaled; but she escaped with a very small, shallow cut on her forehead! We knew that the accident was a test of our faith and that the enemy was trying to nip our vision right in its bud. But the Lord's mercy and grace protected us.

Amazing Answers to Prayer

Same month (June 1986) my former boss, Mr. Marty Lonsdale, called me into his office in World Vision and told me of World Vision's decision to help us in our faith-venture by publishing an article about what we planned to do in north India. That was a very pleasant surprise as I had never seen World Vision do anything like that for anyone.

I was interviewed for the article by Randy Miller, one of the editors of World Vision magazine. During the course of his interview Randy asked me how much it would cost to build the proposed training center. As I was still raising funds for purchasing land and had not even given any thought about the construction I was at a loss how to answer him right away. At the same time I knew that if I answered him and said that I had not thought about it or I did not know how much it would cost it would be a bad reflection on me as a poor planner. So I prayed to the Lord and sought His help as I sat in front of Randy. All this happened in just a few seconds. Before I knew what was happening I blurted out: "Two hundred thousand dollars"!

When I walked out of the interview I was kicking myself. "Why in the world did I say \$200,000?" I kept asking myself. I had no idea at that time that the Holy Spirit had put that figure in my mind and that figure would later turn out to be very crucial in the miracle that the Lord was working out!

The same month Pastor Steve Riggle, a good friend who was pioneering a new church-plant in Houston, Texas invited me to preach for him. When I shared with him that we needed at least \$50,000 to buy land for the training center he committed to give us the tithe of the amount. That was the largest gift promised thus far.

As he was driving me back to the airport on Monday morning he told me that we must make a model of the proposed campus for fund-raising purposes. As I had not even thought about construction I told Pastor Steve that I did not know what we would be constructing. We might be building one or two rooms as our vision at that time was very small and funding was a major challenge. My plan at that time was to start training with half a dozen young people or at the most a dozen. This could be accomplished in a few rooms.

Pastor Steve is a visionary. He told me that it did not matter whether we had funds or not. His advice to me was: "Dream!" "What would you like to see built if you had funds? What all buildings do you need? Dormitory? Library? Class-rooms? Just sit and dream and have someone build a model so that those who see it would be excited to support you."

When I shared Steve's counsel with my own pastor, Pastor Herb Maydwell, he too thought that it was an excellent idea and immediately contacted an architect, Mr. Carl Mantl, who was a member of our church, West Los Angeles Christian Center.

Carl was a new believer. He had come to the US from Austria and was a non-practicing Roman Catholic when he started attending our small church in Culver City, California. Carl had recently met Jesus personally in WLCC and was fervently serving the Lord when Pastor Herb told him the idea of building a model for a Bible

College/Seminary in India. As a new believer Carl was ecstatic. He was joined by Mr. Craig Reynolds, a graphic artist and good friend.

Pastor Herb organized a meeting of all four of us in his office. I shared with Carl and Craig the vision that the Lord had given us and told them that our initial investigations have taken us to a city called Dehra Dun, situated at the foothills of the Himalaya Mountains and that we hope to purchase about five acres of land there and construct a small facility that would train a few dozen you people for the Kingdom work. Carl in his enthusiasm scolded me for the smallness of my faith and vision and wanted to design a multi-million dollar facility. I had to dampen his enthusiasm and request him to build something really small. Looking back, Carl had it right! The Lord indeed had something far bigger in mind than my small faith envisioned at that time! “Out of the mouth of babes. . .” (Psalm 8:2).

Carl confessed that he had no idea about architecture in India as he was trained in the West. I told him that we would use what he was designing only as a fund-raising tool and not as the “real model” for constructing the campus. He was free to build the model according to his own training. Carl was not entirely satisfied. He requested that I describe to him in detail the land we had located in Dehra Dun so that he could make a replica of the campus site in the model. I had to once again tell him that we had no land. We were merely scouting the area of Dehra Dun. The only thing I could tell him was that the city was located at the foothills of the Himalaya Mountains. He was rather disappointed and said something like this to all of us: “Well, I want something in this model to be real; I am going to ask the Lord to show me the property He has for you in India and I am going to make a replica of that in the model.”

I did not take Carl seriously. But he was serious. He did pray and ask the Lord to show him the land He had separated for us in India and proceeded to make the model. In the meantime we had a meeting of several friends who served on the Board of Good News for India in our home in Glendora, California. Leela had cooked a nice dinner for all of us and after the dinner we were sitting around the dining table and talking. All on a sudden she said something like this: "We are trying to raise \$50,000 and buy five acres of land in India. Once we get the land what are we going to do with it?"

Before anyone could say anything she continued: "I feel very strongly that if we ask the Lord, He would give us five acres for half that amount; then we will have some money left to construct something." As soon as she said that Pastor Herb spoke up: "That's the Lord's counsel to us. Let us pray." Immediately we all held hands around the dining table and Pastor Herb led us in prayer asking the Lord to give us the five acres we need for \$25,000. And the next Sunday morning he announced the prayer request from the pulpit. Our good friends, Mr. Jim Jones, who is an accountant and his wife Beverly, who helped us a lot in the early days with processing gifts and sending out receipts, printed a large dot-matrix banner that read: "Five acres for \$25,000", and hung it in the foyer of our church!

The whole church was caught-up in this prayer movement. I must confess that I was a reluctant participant in all of these. My mind kept telling me that this was unrealistic. "Had I not talked to real estate agents who told me that it would take a minimum of Rs. 100,000 for an acre? How can we then pray and ask the Lord for half that price?" All kinds of questions flooded my mind. Yet I went along with the prayer

movement and kept quiet. But my actions spoke much louder and pointed to my lack of faith: I decided that I would not go to India until I had \$50,000!

Miracle through *World Vision* Magazine

In the meantime the August-September 1986 issue of the *World Vision* magazine (pages 16-17) came out with a two-page article written by Randy Miller entitled “One of India’s Own is Enabling Evangelists in Northern India.” Randy had done a remarkable job in writing the article summarizing well what we wanted to do in North India. In the article he included the \$200,000 figure that I had mentioned in the interview I had with Randy.

The article generated a number of letters from around the world. Most were encouraging letters and a number of them contained gifts for the ministry. Our friends Jim and Beverly Jones helped us in collecting the mail, processing the gifts and sending out receipts. They would answer all the routine letters for us and give to us what they thought that we should personally reply.

The article was read by a young pastor and his wife who had just recently taken a parish in North-East Georgia and they also wrote a letter. And through that letter I met them and we became close friends.

One day Jim brought to me a letter and told me: “George, look at this letter; this looks like a child’s writing to me. I almost threw it out; but thought that you need to see it before it is tossed.” The handwriting did look like a child’s; but the content of the letter was most certainly did not come from a child.

The writer identified herself as a Southern Baptist believer who was well informed of the fact that Western missionaries were no longer allowed in India. She thought that the vision that was described in the World Vision magazine article was good and wanted to know more about it.

As I was reading the letter Holy Spirit clearly talked to me. I clearly heard the Holy Spirit saying: "Something very significant will happen with this person." The fact that the letter itself was not at all impressive made that very intriguing. Yet, in obedience to the Holy Spirit, I immediately wrote a detailed reply to Mrs. Janie Fountain New, the author of the letter. And I waited for the "very significant" thing that the Holy Spirit promised. I wrote to her in July 1986. There was no reply for months. At times I would remember what I thought was the Holy Spirit's words. Since there was no response from Mrs. New I dismissed what I thought was from the Holy Spirit as probably my own imagination.

I immersed myself in raising the \$50,000 needed for the land. Carl Mantl and Craig Reynolds were busy making the model; I was going around and talking to anyone who would listen to me. By late September we had the needed \$50,000. I informed the Board that I was ready to go return to India to purchase the land. Board gave me green light. I decided that I would go back to India the first week of November as I wanted to attend the annual conference of Christian Evangelistic Assemblies that was scheduled for the last week of October in Redondo Beach, California.

God Speaks through an Architect's Model

Carl and Craig finished the model just in time for the Redondo Beach convention. Without telling me they took the model to the church and poisoned it in the foyer in such a way that it would be the first thing that was visible when one entered the church. There it was, a professional model- 4 x 4 in size, buildings, cars, trees, and people! It was well done. What struck me the first time I laid my eyes on the model was the landscape. Remember, Carl was praying to the Lord to show him the land He had for us in India. Carl was convinced that the Lord showed him exactly that and had made a replica of what he saw.

When one faced the school the land sloped down to the front in tiers. And on the right-hand rear corner of the property there stood a mount: a mount with steps on it, almost like a staircase. For some reason this landscape jumped at me; I could not put it out of my mind. I kept saying to myself that it was just Carl's imagination. Yet I could not shake it.

The night before I was to fly out of Los Angeles Jim, our accountant friend phoned us with excitement in his voice. We got another letter from Mrs. New. She was promising the \$200,000 that was mentioned in the World Vision magazine article! I wanted to see the letter in person. Jim took the letter to Pastor Herb Maydwell and he brought it to us. There was a condition for the gift: it was a memorial gift. The school needed to be named after Mrs. News' late husband, Mr. Luther W. New Jr.

Immediately we called all the Board members. There was unanimous agreement that naming was not a problem at all provided that Mrs. New would not interfere in the running of the school. I was entrusted by the Board to write a thank-you note to her

informing that the Board would get in touch with her to work out the details. Board chose Mr. Rory Starks as the contact person with Mrs. New to work out all the details of the gift. We all marveled at the way in which the Lord moved so quickly to begin fulfilling the promise “Jehovah Jireh” that He gave me in October 1985.

I almost did not need an airplane to fly to India! God’s faithfulness created a real excitement in the hearts of the team members in India as well. They had scouted out a number of properties for me to see. So we plunged into shopping for land traveling from one end of Dehra Dun to the other. But we found nothing that we could afford even with the fifty thousand dollars.

I told Babu about the model that Carl and Craig built in Los Angeles. For some reason he too took it very seriously. Every time we went to see a property he would ask me: “Do you see the steps?”

Well, no steps; nothing we can afford. We spent well over a month hunting for land in Dehra Dun area. We were faithful in our prayers, praying many times a day: “Lord, lead us to the exact place that you have for us.”

Miracle of Answered Prayer

While both Babu and I were almost ready to give up God used a good Christian friend, Mrs. Massey, a school teacher in Dehra Dun to introduce us to a Hindu gentleman who was the “Chief” (“Pradhan”) of Kulhan village, a village about ten kilometers from the city. The chief was a gracious gentleman who was very eager to help us. After hearing our story he thought for a moment and told us that he knew of a plot of land that might be ideal for us. We had reached his place by evening and it was already dusk. He

encouraged us to take a look at the land and took us to far side of a dry river bed and pointed across. The land was on the other side of the river. Mr. Jacob Chacko, then Principal of Doon Bible College and a member of our Indian Board, spoke up and said that since the land is on the other side of the river it might not be suitable for our purpose as water and electricity might not be available there. I think that all of us were tired as we had a long day. So we turned back and walked away.

But in the fading light of the dusk both Babu and I had faintly seen the features of the land and both of us were restless that night. The next morning we approached Mr. Jacob Chacko and sought his help in going back to the land to see it by daylight though he had thought that it might not be suitable. He was gracious to drive us back to Kulhan. This time we did not stop on the far side of the river. We walked into the dry river with the Chief and several others. We could not believe our eyes. If I did not know any better I would have thought Carl Mantl stood where we were standing when he made the model in Los Angeles! There the land was sloping down to us in tiers! And on the right hand rear corner stood this unique looking mount with steps on them- just like a staircase! Babu did not need to ask me! Both of us ran in excitement and climbed to the top of the mount and we praised the Lord for His clear and definite guidance. By then the group caught up with us. We asked the Chief how big the land was. He thought it was over five acres. He had no idea about the price. But he told us that he would be glad to introduce us to the owner of the land.

So we got back into the jeep and drove down to the city where we met Dr. Goyal, a medical doctor, who owned the property. After our initial greetings we asked him whether the land was still available. Dr. Goyal informed us that it was still available and

that the plot was a little over five acres. Then he asked us a ridiculously low price in comparison with the asking price of land everywhere else. When questioned as to the reason of this low asking price he told us an amazing story. His father had purchased that land a number of years back to convert it into a mango orchard. In fact his father had planted mango trees a number of times in the land; but for some reason they all kept dying. There were hardly two dozen trees left in the whole plot. They were stunted in growth and were not at all healthy looking trees. Normally mango trees would grow almost anywhere and there are very healthy mango orchards nearby. Evidently the Goyal family was disappointed that the land proved to be unproductive. Moreover, Dr. Goyal wanted to expand his clinic and for the needed funds he had to sell the land. He has been trying to sell the land for a while now. As the plot was zoned agricultural he could get a buyer. Who would purchase a piece of land that is zoned agricultural and in which not even mango trees would grow? He had tried to get the zoning changed and that too did not work out. In short, he was in a fix and was eager to get rid of the land. He encouraged us to buy the land saying that since we were planning to build a school we might get the necessary zoning changes and other permissions.

Dr. Goyal agreed to sign a contingency agreement stating that he would sell us the land provided we got the necessary permissions to build the school. We hired Mr. Jitendra Kumar, a well-known attorney with a great reputation for being not only efficient but straight forward and honest, and Mr. C.B. Narang, Modern India Architects, to draw up legal agreements and plans for construction. We entrusted the matter in the Lord's hands and set a six month deadline for all the necessary permissions such as zoning change, sealing change, and building permits. Before the expiry of the deadline we had

all the permissions. When the land was surveyed it turned out to be 5.9 acres! Including all the legal expenses God gave us 5.9 acres for \$25,000, just as my wife and our little church in Los Angeles prayed!

When I took pictures of the land and showed them to Carl and Craig they could not believe their eyes. What Carl and Craig had done turned out to be a prophecy. God does speak even today! Every time we look at that mount we are reminded that we are where the Lord wants us to be. We believe that it is His chosen place and NTC campus and the headquarters of BSS and CEA are here.

Vision Becomes a Reality

Thus, finally the vision that the Lord gave us was becoming a reality. Soon after the groundbreaking we started construction of the campus. Mrs. New came through with her promise. Mrs. New and her sister, Mrs. Holliman, ended up giving much more than her initial promise. Their kind help was enough to construct almost all of the first phase of the college. Later they also helped to construct a library and a dormitory for women. Through the miracles the Lord performed through an architect in Los Angeles and two widows in Georgia and numerous caring and praying Christians in many countries the beautiful campus of the Luther W. New Jr. Theological College came into being. As described in Chapter IV, the college was dedicated by Dr. Ted Engstrom, my former boss and leader of World Vision for many years on April 15, 1989. What a day of joy that was!

All through this process God showed Himself to be true to His Word that He gave us in October 1984- Jehovah Jireh. That promise not only covered the needs of the

ministry but also our personal needs. We saw the Lord's hand of provision for our children's education beyond our wildest expectations. God opened doors for our older son to attend three prestigious Universities in the US with hardly any out of pocket expense for us- California Institute of Technology, Harvard and MIT. After completing his undergraduate degree from Caltech he successfully completed M.D. and Ph.D. from Harvard and M.S. in electrical engineering and computer science from MIT. God provided means for our younger son to graduate from University of California, Irvine. And He continues to provide for our needs every day. We give Him all the glory for all that He is doing through BSS/NTC/CEA family of ministries.

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VITA

George Kuruvila Chavanikamannil was born as the youngest child to Mr. M.O. George Chavanikamannil and Mrs. Pennamma Chavanikamannil on April 26, 1948. His family was a traditional Christian family belonging to the ancient St. Thomas (Syrian) Christian community that claims St. Thomas, one of the twelve disciples of Jesus, baptized their forefathers when the apostle arrived in southwestern India in 52 AD. He was raised in the fear of the Lord by his godly parents. At the age of nineteen, while preparing to become a lawyer, he met the Lord Jesus and was called into the ministry of preaching the gospel. He received a specific call to northern India. After completing master's degree in English from the University of Kerala he taught English for a year before joining Every Home Crusade to minister to university students.

In 1973 George married Leelamma and they settled in the US. In 1977 he graduated from Fuller Theological Seminary with Master of Divinity degree. From 1977 till 1986 he worked with World Vision US. In 1986 George resigned his job to pioneer the ministries of Good News for India, Bharat Susamachar Samiti, New Theological College and Christian Evangelistic Assemblies. Later Leela also resigned her job with Bank of America and joined George to lead these ministries about which this study is done. George enrolled in Gordon-Conwell's Doctor of Ministry program in 2005 and plans to graduate in May 2011.

George and Leela have two grown sons, Finny and Renny. Finny is married to Laura and they have three sons- Luke, Ethan and Timothy.